SEPTEMBER
30th
1925
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PUBLISHED
THREE TIMES A MONTH

Adventure

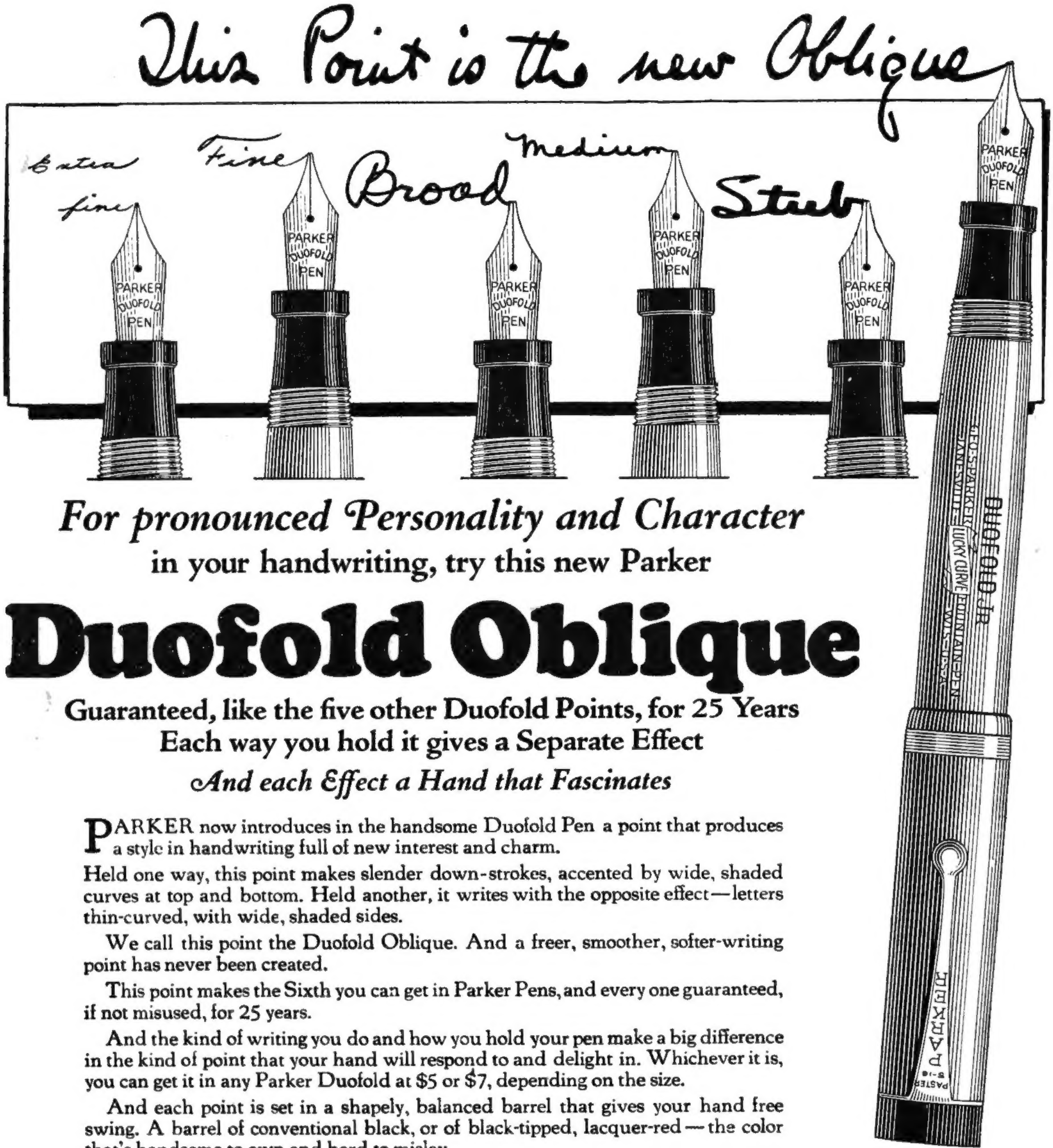
Harold Lamb
Captain Dingle
H. Bedford-Jones
Gordon Young
Bruce Johns
John Webb
Alex. McLaren
Frederick J. Jackson
David Thibault

3 Complete Novelettes

SEPTEMBER 30th ISSUE. 1925
VOL. LIV No. 6

ADVENTURE

25 Cents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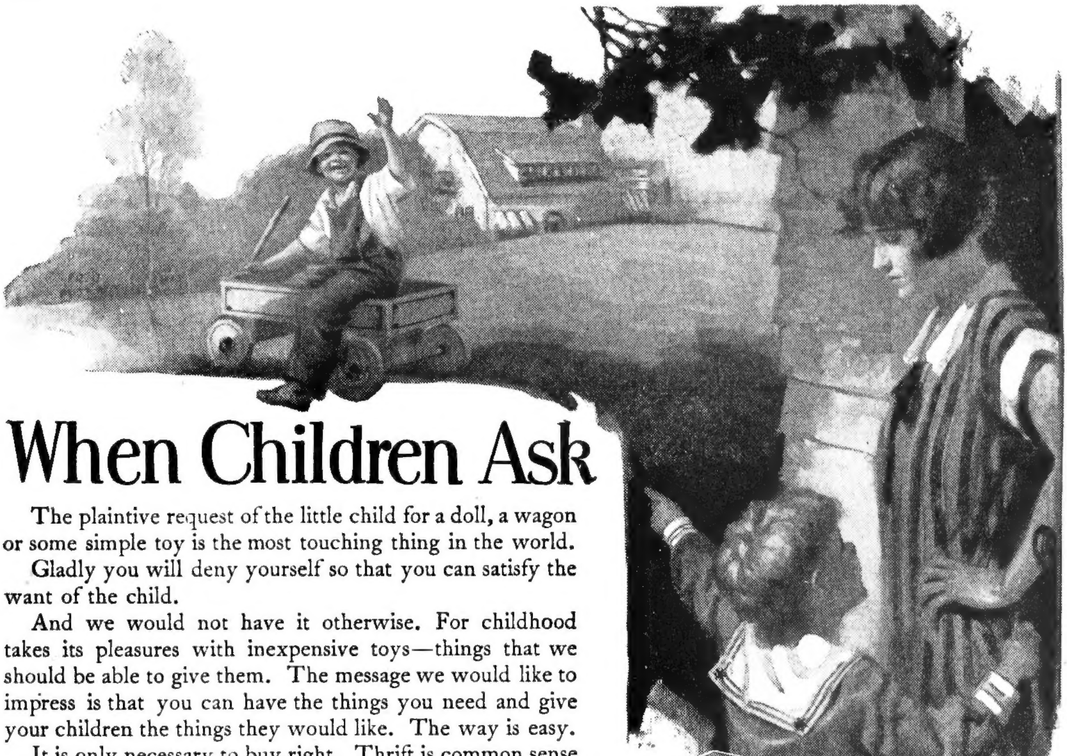

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The plaintive request of the little child for a doll, a wagon or some simple toy is the most touching thing in the world.

Gladly you will deny yourself so that you can satisfy the want of the child.

And we would not have it otherwise. For childhood takes its pleasures with inexpensive toys—things that we should be able to give them. The message we would like to impress is that you can have the things you need and give your children the things they would like. The way is easy.

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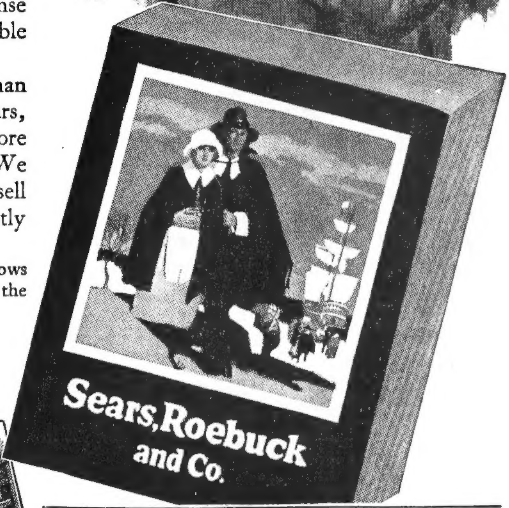
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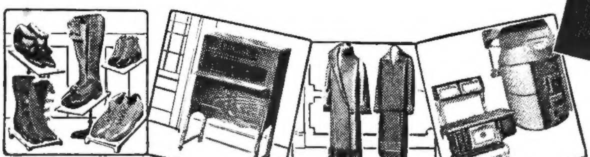

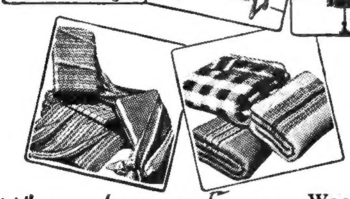

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ADVENTURE
Sept. 30th, 1925

Published three times a month by The Ridgway Company at Spring and Macdougal Sts., New York, N. Y. Yearly subscription $6.00 in advance; single copy 25 cents. Entered as second-class matter Oct. 1, 1910, at the post-office at New York, N. Y., under the act of March 3, 1879.

Volume 54
Number 6

Health Heroes

FIFTY years ago every man, woman and child in the world was threatened by lurking dangers against which there was no protection. From time to time epidemics of contagious diseases raged through communities. The doctors of those days did their best to *cure* but were largely powerless to *prevent* sickness. Small wonder that strange beliefs were associated with the prevention of diseases, the causes of which were unknown.

There is a record in an old book of English customs of many curious charms to ward off disease—powdered snake-skins to prevent typhoid; a live spider in a peach-stone basket hung around the neck as a preventive of scarlet fever; garden snails and earth-worms steeped in beer to check consumption. In our own day, some of us were told that a bag of sulphur worn on the chest would prevent diphtheria.

From Superstition to Knowledge—
Until 1876 not one doctor among thousands knew what caused contagious disease. It was in that year—less than fifty years ago—that Louis Pasteur, great French scientist, startled the world by announcing his discovery of germs as a cause of disease. It was the key to the mystery of the cause and prevention of contagious diseases.

The history of medicine from that time reads like a romance—a wonderful story of achievement, of work and struggle, disappointment and hope—and constant fight against the ignorance which cloaked diseases. In just four short years, from 1880 to 1884, were discovered the germs of pneumonia, typhoid, tuberculosis, cholera, erysipelas, diphtheria and tetanus, usually called lockjaw.

Lucky Little Girl!

Fortunate are the youngsters born in this day—whose parents can use the marvelous gifts of modern medical science to prevent sickness.

The splendid work of the Health Heroes is bringing longer, healthier, happier life to millions.

From Knowledge to Action—
Now that we know the cause and know how to fight disease, how can we best apply this knowledge to keep our children well?

The schools of the country, supplementing the work of health officers, provide a natural place for the beginnings of health education.

Cooperate with the school. Aid the teacher who is striving to interest your child in the practice of health habits. Have your child examined by your physician. Have him inoculated against the dread diseases which formerly took thousands of lives.

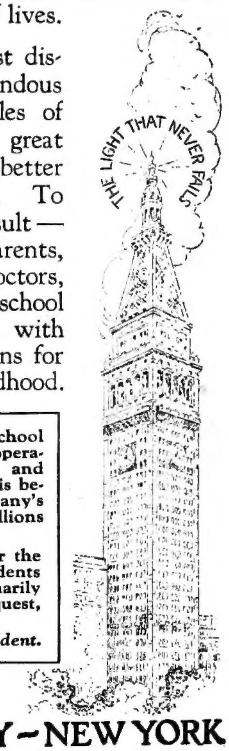
Every year the fight against disease goes on—a tremendous war! Every year the rules of health laid down by the great Health Heroes, are being better understood and followed. To secure the desired result—healthy boys and girls—parents, teachers, specialists, doctors, nurses, as well as the school janitor must join hands with health officers in campaigns for healthier and happier childhood.

The Metropolitan Life Insurance Company recognizing the importance of the great work that 1,000,000 teachers are doing in promulgating health practices has organized a school health bureau under the guidance of eighteen well-known educators of the United States and Canada. These men and women, as the Metropolitan's educational advisory group, are pointing the way in which the Company can best assist educators in school health campaigns.

The advisory group has approved a program which includes the printing of special booklets, leaflets, and charts for use by the teacher in class instruction. A book of instructions for the school janitor has also been prepared. Through cooperation with parents-teachers associations and women's clubs, the message of child health is being spread in many communities. The Company's agents are carrying a similar message to millions of homes.

A series of pamphlets, "Health Heroes", for the use of Junior and Senior High School students has been prepared. Although intended primarily to assist school teachers, they will, upon request, be sent to others interested in child health.

HALEY FISKE, *President.*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The editor assumes no risk for manuscripts and illustrations submitted to this magazine, but he will use all due care while they are in his hands.

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****Occasionally one of our stories will be called an "Off-the-Trail" story, a warning that it is in some way different from the usual magazine stories, perhaps a little different, perhaps a good deal. It may violate a canon of literature or a custom of magazines, or merely be different from the type usually found in this magazine. The difference may lie in unusual theme, material, ending, or manner of telling. No question of relative merit is involved.***

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A free question and answer service bureau of information on outdoor life and activities everywhere. Comprising seventy-four geographical sub-divisions, with special sections on Radio, Mining and Prospecting, Weapons, Fishing, Forestry, Aviation, Army Matters, North American Anthropology, Health on the Trail, Railroading, Herpetology and Entomology.

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Headings . . . . **V. E. Pyles**

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One Complete Novel and Two Complete Novelettes

T. S. STRIBLING

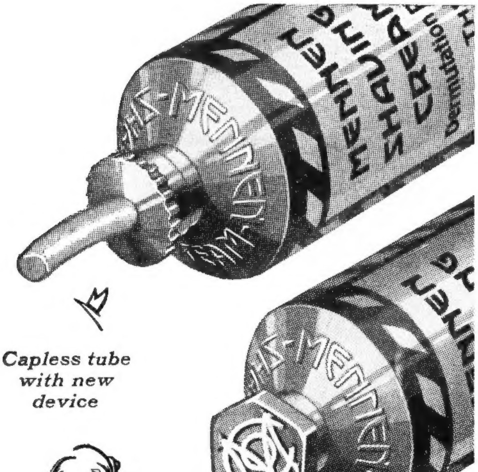
WHEN a dictator has to leave the country which he has ruled with an iron hand, there is likely to be some one wanting his life. The *Magnificent Pompalone* was no exception. When *Pompalone* arrived in Curaçao, Dutch Guiana, he brought this situation with him; putting the matter directly up to police inspector Heinsius. "THE REFUGEES," a complete novelette by T. S. Stribling, will appear in the next issue.

THROUGH the Southern Seas, around the Horn, up through the stormy Western Ocean sailed the wind-broken old *Marchaway*. Her ropes were rotten and her sides were green with months of weary sailing, and on her decks six young boys stood between her and disaster. "THE ENSIGN," a complete novelette by Bill Adams, is in our next issue.

ENEMIES of *Tros* were numerous; even numbering some men that were counted to be his friends. Not only Cæsar opposed him, but weakling kings and fearful Druids sought to block his path to the goal he had set for himself. But *Tros* was not to be intimidated. "ADMIRAL OF CÆSAR'S FLEET" is a complete novel, by Talbot Mundy, in our next issue.

Other stories in the next issue are forecast on the last page of this one.

Adventure **is out on the 10th, 20th and 30th of each month**


Capless tube with new device
Original tube with threaded cap

Tu-be *or* *not* Tu-be?

Way back in 42 B. C., Publius Syrus said: "Powerful indeed is the empire of *habit*."

Sixteen centuries later Shakespeare wrote: "How use doth breed a *habit* in a man!"

Since the copyrights of both these authors have expired, I'll use their nifties to illustrate a point.

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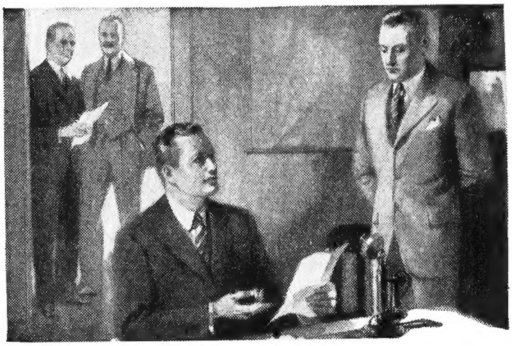
Jim Henry
(Mennen Salesman)



"He's the best man we have"

"His name is Tom Andrews. Came here several years ago asking for a job. Said his wife was sick . . . anything would do. We were busy then, so I took him on. Put him in the shipping department with several other new men doing routine work.

"I'd almost forgotten about him until I got a letter from the International Correspondence Schools telling me he had enrolled for a course and was studying at home.

"I was glad to see that he was ambitious and I took an interest in him. Pretty soon there was a better position open and I gave it to him.

"I've never seen a man go ahead so rapidly. Why, he's had two promotions in the last year and we're going to put him in the sales department as assistant to Ralph Anderson next month. It's a big jump, but I know he'll make good. His studying has put him years ahead of the other men in his department."

How do *you* stand when your employer checks up his men for promotion? Does he pass you by as "just a routine worker," or does he think of you as a man who is ambitious to get ahead? Won't you be far more likely to get the promotion if he knows you are studying at home and really preparing yourself to handle bigger work?

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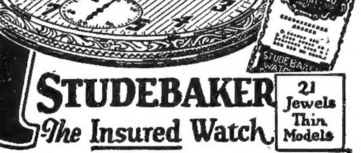

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Fleischmann's Yeast

EAT TWO OR THREE CAKES regularly every day before meals: on crackers —in fruit juices or milk—or just plain. *For constipation especially, dissolve one cake in hot water (not scalding) before breakfast and at bedtime.*

Adventure

September 30
1925
Vol. LIV
No. 6

BOGATYR

A Complete Novelette by Harold Lamb

Author of "The Snow Driver," "Forward," etc.

When the trail is lost and the stars are hidden, the warrior looks in vain to his right hand and his left. When there is neither meat in the saddle bags, nor grain in the sack—let the horse show the way.—TATAR PROVERB.

AYUB, the Zaporoghian Cossack, was lost. As far as he could see in every direction the sea of grass stretched, rippling under the gusts of wind, brushing against his shoulders, although he was a big man and the stallion he bestrode a rangy Kabarda.

Behind him the sun was setting and the whole steppe was turning swiftly from green to purple. The wind had a cold bite to it, and Ayub, all the three hundred pounds of him, ached with hunger. In the chill air of evening an old wound twitched painfully. He wanted very much to build a fire and lie down under shelter for the night.

But how the —— was a warrior, even a Zaporoghian—a free Cossack from the war encampment on the river Dnieper—to make a fire when there was not wood? And grass and tamarisk bushes would not make a shelter fit for a dog.

"*Tà nitchogo!*" he muttered to the silky ear that the black stallion turned back, "it doesn't matter."

He pulled the soiled sheepskin over his shoulders and crossed heavily thewed arms on a chest burned as dark as the *svitka* by the sun's rays. His nankeen trousers, a prized possession, fell in wide baggy folds to the tops of costly red morocco boots with high

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silver heels. Not in all the steppe that stretched from the Black Sea of the Tatars to Moscow, the city of the Muscovite lords, was there another such pair of trousers. Ayub had found them on a dead Tcherkessian chief.

The black Kabarda he had taken in a raid on the horse herd of Ghirei Khan, the Nogai Tatar, and it was the pride of his heart. Although the horse had come a hundred leagues in four days, it was only sweating under the saddle; a wise and stout stallion of the breed known as wolf hunters. Ayub stood up in the stirrups and looked north and south in the last level gleam of the sunset. And he saw no trace of smoke from a hamlet in some distant gully, no glint of light from the horns of straggling cattle.

"—— take you, steppe!" he said, angrily. "You are fragrant and smooth as a Tcherkessian maiden, and I know none fairer. You are full of tricks. You beckon and smile like the maiden, then leave a warrior to sleep in a cold bed."

Laughing, he sank back in the saddle that creaked under his weight. Although there were gray hairs in the scalp-lock curled under his black *kalpak*, his Cossack hat with the red crown, Ayub never bothered his head about anything. It was easier not to think about things and to follow where others led. For this reason the Zaporoghian Cossacks who held the frontier of the steppe had never made him an *ataman,* though few warriors could stand up to Ayub with the sword, or ride more swiftly or drink more corn brandy.

Ayub had a way of trusting everything to luck, and so he got into more scrapes than a drunken bear. Somehow he had kept life in his body in an age when men rode with death at their shoulder on this steppe where the vultures circled over the scurrying quail and Cossack and Tatar alike left their white bones to be washed by the rain. But if he had been put in command of a regiment of warriors there would have been nothing left of the regiment.

In fact, he could not remember how he had left his comrades at the Zaporoghian Siech. He had been drunk when he saddled his horse, and he recalled vaguely a tavern a couple of days later where he had thrown coins to the musicians and had led out the prettiest girls to the cleared space between the tables. At his belt hung a heavy pouch of silver, and he did not know how it had come there.

Reaching over his shoulder he touched the cross on the hilt of his sword and reflected. A sunset like this, the Moslems said, was an omen—Allah had hung the banners of death in the sky. He had seen such sunsets before and always men had yielded up their breath before the night was done. Where was he to find shelter?

As nearly as Ayub could remember he had ridden east and a little north from the war camp. He was at the edge of the salt barrens where sage begins to appear. Ahead of him somewhere should be a small river, the Donetz. Beyond that should be the *auls* of the Nogai Tatars, though God alone knew just where those tent villages were, since they moved around like wolf packs. In fact Ayub suspected that he had come too far into Tatar country, and this put a new thought into his head.

Not far from the Donetz in this part of the steppe was an abandoned wooden castle, built in forgotten times by the hordes that had followed Tamerlane to the very gates of Moscow. The log castle would provide him with firewood and shelter, and as for the Tatars, they avoided it for superstitious reasons. But where was it?

"*Tchorttielya vosmi dvortzi!*" he grunted. "—— take you, castles! The stallion will find you before I will."

So he tossed the reins on the Kabarda's neck and settled back in the saddle.

The stallion was trotting along a lane in the grass with the purposeful gait of a horse that knows very well where it is going to be quartered that night. They were approaching a river because wild ducks rose with a discordant clamor from the reeds far ahead of them. By the time the last streak of orange had faded in the sky behind them, Ayub's keen eyes picked out the glimmer of fire on a knoll near the spot where the ducks had started up. Toward this speck of light the Kabarda headed with a rush, as if to say the day's ride was over.

But Ayub, who had no desire to stumble into a Tatar ambush, reined in the horse while he studied the light.

Many ruddy gleams pierced the darkness on the hillock, and a vague glow rose from the earth, as if the summit of the mound had been hollowed out and a fire kindled in its depths. A mutter of voices and a hammering of axes reached the Cossack.

The steppe around here should be deserted—he had not seen a living man for days.

"Can't be Tatars," he reflected. "They wouldn't make such a —— of a racket after dark. Can't be any honest folk out here either—"

With a prickling of the scalp, he remembered the evil omen of the blood-red sunset and wondered whether the knoll might not be in possession of hob-goblins and gnomes. Such mounds, common enough on the great steppe, were often burial places of the tribesmen. In other ages the conquering Mongols had interred their dead in mounds, with gold and silver plate and jeweled weapons, and had slain war horses to bear the dead company to the kingdom of Erlik below the earth. Ayub had seen hardy spirits, Muscovite merchants who came from the cities of the north, dig up such bones and buried riches. For his part he did not fear the live Tatars half as much as the dead.

HE WAS on the point of turning back when he reflected that his horse showed no uneasiness. The stallion always shied when a vampire was about at night. Besides, ghosts did not chop wood to start fires going. Cautiously—for a man who did not know the meaning of caution otherwise—Ayub advanced until he made out a palisade on the hillock and the shapes of wooden towers.

The ruddy glow came from large fires within the wall and the light he had first seen from the openings that served for windows in the blockhouse. This was the abandoned stronghold of the Tatars for which he had been searching. Reassured, the Cossack went around to the gate and found a man on guard.

"Health to you, brother," said Ayub. "What company is this?"

Either the sentry did not understand or would not answer. He leaned on his spear, looking up at the Cossack sidewise, so that Ayub did not know if he were friendly or not. But inside the palisade were other men-at-arms and slaves sitting about the fires where quarters of sheep and joints of beef were roasting. Spears were stacked in the corners and rusted iron helmets lay beside some of the warriors. A line of carts, heavily loaded, stood by the stables. Some of the slaves wore wolfskins, but many were nearly naked. All of them stared at the horseman who had appeared in the gate—evidently they had never seen a Zaporoghian Cossack in his regalia before.

At the doorway of the main building, a rambling one-story log structure, Ayub dismounted and found that an officer had come out to look at him—a black-browed giant who carried a whip and a battle ax.

"What fellow are you?" demanded the stranger, scowling. "Where are you from?"

Light dawned on Ayub. By his accent the captain of the warriors was a Muscovite, a Moskya in Cossack speech. So this company was from the northern towns, a long journey. What was it doing in the steppe?

"Are you the master here?" retorted Ayub who did not relish the other's surly tone. "Hey, *Krivonos*—Crooked Nose?"

For a moment the two warriors exchanged glances without the slightest change of expression, the impatient Cossack repressing a broad grin and the stalwart Muscovite wrestling with his own thoughts.

"How could I be master?" he responded. "My lord the prince is within."

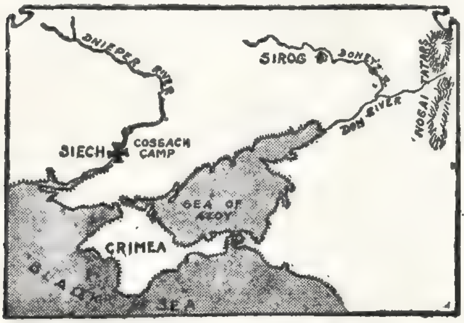
Ayub had seen Muscovite merchants before, but never one of the grandees, though he had heard of their growing power. Tempted by curiosity and the smell of roast meats and fragrant wine, he thrust Crooked Nose aside and stalked into the log fortress.

The roof had fallen in long since and trees were growing within the ruins, but the tall grass had been trampled down and the *débris* of rafters had been heaped on two great fires. Tables had been built out of the timber, and at these tables sat thirty or forty men, some wearing mail that had once been gilded, others in long tabards with painted collars, their armor thrown carelessly underfoot.

Their leader, a young man, sat at the head of the higher table where the firelight struck full on his red-gold hair that hung to his shoulders, and his face as colorless as wax. His head, jutting forward as if he could not manage to hold it erect, was turned toward the Cossack who, cap in hand bowed low, expecting an invitation to seat himself at one of the tables—perhaps to be offered a goblet of wine by the young lord. Such was the custom and the hospitality of the Zaporoghians, who would never suffer a stranger to go unfed at meal time.

Servitors in long blue coats ornamented with gilt braid, and wearing green slippers, glanced at him apathetically as they hurried about with flagons to fill the cups of the vassals.

A steward who wore a hat trimmed with sable and as high as a minaret—as Ayub thought admiringly—and who carried a staff came over to him and announced that His Illustriousness, the Prince Vladimir was pleased to ask a question of the stranger, and Ayub bowed again, to his girdle, at the bench where the young lord was seated.



"You are wearing a sword, Cossack—such a sword!" observed Vladimir.

"Aye, noble sir," Ayub admitted, scenting a chance to tell one of his stories.

No other Cossack had a sword like this one, for he had taken it from a Walloon, and it was a two-handed affair, as heavy as a sheep and as long as a pike. Only a man of really great strength could make it whistle around his head, and Ayub wore it slung on his back.

"By your top-knot you are a Zaporoghian. I warrant you are one of the hero-warriors they call *bogatyr*."

"Nay, God knows, your highness, no such luck is mine. In our Siech only the wisest and most famous knights are given that title."

Ayub stared thoughtfully at the gold goblets on the white cloths, and the steaming platters. Before Vladimir a whole swan had been set, and two of the slaves were hard at work carving it. Many of the vassals had fallen asleep, overcome by the wine that stained their rich linen and damask. In one corner, where the prince's bed had been set up under a canopy, he saw several leather chests, and Ayub wondered what they contained. Either this was a wealthy lord, traveling in state or a notable brigand. Truly a notable robber because a dozen *boyars* sat at his table—nobles who did not wear the iron collar of slavery.

"They drink like lords," he thought, admiringly. "Only they don't talk or sing at all—just drop off."

Struck by a sudden impulse, he turned again to the young noble who was watching the carving of the swan.

"Your pardon, *kniaz grodny*," he muttered, "but this is an ill place to camp for long. The frontier posts are far off—far off. You'll have Tatars around like bees."

One or two of the soberest vassals looked up at him angrily, but Vladimir laughed.

"What a dolt you are, Cossack! There are no Tatars on this bank of the Dnieper."

Ayub fancied that he must be jesting, until he looked into the vacant gray eyes.

"Noble sir, may I roast in a brazen ox, but this is not the river Dnieper. Nay, Father Dnieper lies a hundred leagues to the west. This is the Donetz, beyond the frontier."

One of the *boyars*, a gentleman in attendance on the prince, rose from his place and struck his fist on the table.

"How could this river be the Donetz?"

"Because it is, noble sir," responded Ayub bluntly. "God be my witness, I have slept in this *dvortza* many a time after shooting wild ducks in the reeds."

"You dolt!" The *boyar* ran his words together, being heavy in drink. "We can not be beyond the frontier, because His Illustriousness, the Prince led us himself, taking no other guide, from his estates near Moscow over the devil knows how much accursed barren plains to this place. Here is the Dnieper, our destination. No doubt other Christians will come to greet us before long."

Ayub shook his head.

"Not other Christains, noble sir, but heretic Muhammadans will greet you. You will hear their shout—*ghar-ghar-ghar!* Then they will take your horses and cut you up like hares; that is how they will greet you."

The stout *boyar* blinked his good-natured, watery eyes and thrust both hands into his beard, looking at his lord for support in the argument. Instead, Vladimir saw fit to ask a question.

"You speak of the Tatar hordes, Cossack. Why do you think they will raid this place?"

"Because it is the month for them to come. When the snow melts and the steppe dries out enough for horses, noble sir, the Tatar comes across the line for cattle and prisoners to sell as slaves. You see, after the winter they need beef and money. Later, when the harvests are being gotten in, we look for him again."

"*Gospody batyushka!*" said the young prince. "God save us! Would the Tatar hordes, think you, attack a hundred men in a walled place like this?"

"Well, not here perhaps."

The Cossack remembered that the tribesmen avoided the ruined castle.

"Why not here?" Vladimir pressed.

"Because this place—Sirog they call it—has some of their graves in it."

Vladimir waited until the cup-bearer behind him had filled his goblet with foaming spirits before he answered, the shadow of a smile in his gray eyes:

"This is the Dnieper right enough. They all look alike, the rivers in this wilderness. You've got them mixed, that's all. Ah, what a splendid horse!"

Hearing a scuffling behind him, Ayub glanced over his shoulder. The Kabarda stallion, hungry and restive, had come through the door to look for his master—to be unsaddled and have the bit taken out of his mouth. On the rare occasions when he slept within walls, Ayub permitted the horse to share his quarters, to make sure that the stallion was comfortable and safe from thieves.

Tossing his small, lean head and avoiding the servitors and the fires, the stallion came up to Ayub, snuffling the back of his neck.

"Go along, you devilkin!" grunted Ayub, vastly pleased, nevertheless. "A wolf hunter, this!"

The prince had not taken his eyes off the Kabarda, and now he spoke a word to the cup-bearer who offered Ayub the untasted goblet that had been on the table before Vladimir. Ayub stroked his mustache down, lifted the goblet in both hands and drank the health of the company, while the indolent glance of the prince dwelled on his long sword.

"Now go," said Vladimir, "look at the river again, and tell me if it is not the Dnieper."

After quaffing the heated spirits Ayub swaggered through the gate, accompanied by Crooked Nose. They went out of the palisade and the Cossack stared up at the towers, painted crimson by the glow of firelight. Then he studied the strip of gray that was the distant river.

"That is the Donetz," he observed decidedly. "What kind of a game is the young lord playing, eh, Crooked Nose?"

The man from the north seemed to be enveloped in impenetrable silence. Leaning on his battle ax, he loomed over the powerful frontiersmen, his small eyes shifting from one thing to another.

"My name," he growled at length," is not Crooked Nose. They call me Durak, the Idiot."

"They named you well," acknowledged Ayub, striding back to the fort. As he drew near the entrance he shouted suddenly:

"Look out for his heels—keep your hands off him, fools! Stand back!"

Some of the servitors who wore the iron collars about their necks had attempted to take the saddle off the stallion within the blockhouse. The horse was tossing his head and circling, and when his leather shod hoofs lashed out, a luckless slave was knocked prone, his ribs crushed.

"Out of the way!" Ayub repeated impatiently to the dozen men-at-arms who had taken position in front of the door. Instead of stepping aside, they unsheathed their swords and lifted their shields. Stopping in his tracks, Ayub grunted and shaded his eyes to look into their faces.

"You may not go back," Durak cautioned him. "The lord prince has taken a fancy to your nag. Half a verst away is a settlement of your fellow Cossacks. Go thither and give thanks to the Saints that your skin hasn't been slit."

It did not enter his head to take the Muscovite's advice. Quick-tempered as the Kabarda that had carried him over the steppe trails for half a dozen years, Ayub was gripped by hot anger that left him quivering and snorting. His horse could be taken from him in only one fashion.

Reaching back over his right shoulder with both hands, he gripped the hilt of the heavy sword and pulled it clear. With the blade swinging in front of him in glittering circles he stepped forward. Two shields splintered under the edge of the sword and the Muscovites slipped apart, to run at him from the side.

But Ayub had been at hand blows too many times to be cut down in this fashion. Leaping to the right he knocked a man prone with the flat of the blade, and whistled shrilly.

The Kabarda answered the whistle instantly. Rearing and avoiding the hands that clutched at the rein, the horse galloped through the entrance, and no Muscovite had hardihood to stand in his way. With a final flourish of the long sword Ayub ran to the stallion, gripping the saddle horn with his left hand.

He crouched for the leap into the saddle, and something crashed down on his skull. Flames spread before his eyes, and he pitched forward. Nor did he feel the earth upon which he sprawled without consciousness. Durak had picked up a small log and had thrown it with all his strength at the Cossack.

II

AYUB was not long in coming to himself, because the blood on his neck had not dried yet. It was still dripping from his broken scalp, and he sat up, spitting it out savagely. His head hurt him and he swallowed a groan when he stood up, leaning on the sword that was still fast in one fist.

To take a man's horse—to set him afoot in that part of the steppe—was something beyond belief. To take a horse like the Kabarda stallion was a blacker crime, to Ayub's way of thinking, than to strip him naked. They had carried him a good way from the palisade. Possibly they had meant to toss him into the river but had found him too heavy to carry.

Better for them, perhaps, if they had. Because the Cossack had no intention of leaving Sirog until he had recovered his horse or settled the account.

He remembered that the man-at-arms, Durak, had said something about a camp near at hand, and he could see, in the half light of a quarter moon, a road leading from the blockhouse off into the tall grass. Sheathing his sword, he began to walk away, cursing the weight of the heavy blade, his silver heels that were made to grip the stirrup, not the earth, and all Muscovites of past and future generations.

In a little while he came to the lights of a village. A cluster of wattle and daub huts stood around a log *kortchma*, a tavern, and a half finished church. Farther off were sheep folds and cattle pens. It was plainly a frontier settlement, like a thousand others that had crawled out into the plain protected by Cossack outposts. But he did not understand what it was doing on the Donetz.

When he kicked open the tavern door a half dozen men stared at him apathetically. They had long, unkept hair and hollow cheeks and were smaller in build than the Zaporoghians. One wore the leather apron of a smith, and another, seated by the fire, was making a pair of shoes out of a strip of horsehide.

"Give me corn brandy—food—anything," he cried, and, seeing a bucket of water standing near the door, emptied it over his head. Wiping his eyes clear with his sleeve he moved toward the fire, noticing that a young fellow in a white *svitka* rose to make way for him.

When he had emptied the last bowl of gruel and had downed his fourth cup, he stretched his arms, rubbed his head and spread his legs out to the fire.

"Well, forgive me. God be with you, brothers, Cossacks! I had a little rap on the dome up there at the castle—but who are you and what the —— are you doing in this place?"

To this the tavern-keeper, a dour man, and heavily bearded, made answer slowly.

"We saw that you had met with misfortune, good sir, but that is nothing strange in this country. Are you a Zaporoghian?"

Ayub wrung the water out of his mustaches, and from the long scalp lock that hung down one shoulder.

"Don't you know a Zaporoghian when you see one? Then you must have been born in a Jew's back-yard—that's certain."

The tavern-keeper fingered his beard, and the others nodded understandingly.

"Aye, it's true that this fine knight is a Zaporoghian. That's the way the warriors talk, on the border."

"We are town Cossacks," explained one. "From up Moscow way, —— knows how far. We built cottages there and worked at trades, near the castles of the great lords."

"*Shapoval,*" thought Ayub, "workmen who take their hats off to everybody." Aloud he asked, with growing curiosity—

"What are you doing here?"

The tavern-keeper, who was called Kukubenko by the others, sat down on a log and spat into the flames.

"We're here along of Prince Vladimir, noble knight. It happened like this: The illustrious prince was in disgrace at court because he angered the emperor himself in some way or other. So said the priest who is with us here. That is why the prince has let his hair grow long, to show he is in disgrace. Such is the custom up there. But Vladimir fears no man and even his wolf pack—for that is how he calls his *boyars*—take pains not to taunt him to his face."

"But what has that to do with you?"

"*Ekh*—the *boyars* up there and the emperor said that villages must be sent to settle on the border. Out on the plain here there are not enough villages, nor men to tend cattle and raise wheat. So the priest told us. And sure enough, we were ordered out into the steppe—all of our village. And His Illustriousness, the Prince, was ordered by the emperor, because of the crime he committed, to take his *boyars* and his vassals and go and protect us. Aye, to go into exile and not to show himself again until our village was settled."

"It angered him," spoke up another. "It's God's truth that he has been severe with us. We lost half the cattle on the way and the wolves took many of the sheep."

Ayub had heard of these colonists who were being sent out by the Muscovites to claim the new lands along the rivers, and had no great love for them. They turned the open steppe of the Cossacks into tilled land and grazing ground for their cattle.

"Do you know where you are?" he asked.

"Nay," responded Kukubenko. "This river is the Dnieper, isn't it?"

"Who told you that?"

"Durak, good sir."

"May the foul fiend fly away with Durak!" growled Ayub, clenching his hands on his knees.

Kukubenko glanced at the door in alarm, and hastened to talk of something else.

"This youth who crossed the river a little while ago says it is the Donetz. But after all, what does it matter. We are here."

"What youth?" demanded Ayub, and saw at once who they meant.

In the far corner was the boy who had given up his place at the fire to the warrior. He sat against the wall, Tatar fashion, a *bandura*—a three-stringed violin—across his knees.

His white *svitka* was clean camel's hair, and his slender chest was covered with an embroidered vest. A wide, black velvet sash bound his middle from loins to upper ribs. But what drew Ayub's scrutiny was the boy's pantaloons, tucked into high slippers of soft leather. They were green.

Now green, among the Moslems, was a color only to be worn by the *hadjis*. A Christian having any green upon his person would, if he were captured by the Moslems on the border, be immediately tortured in a peculiarly unpleasant way. Ayub knew of one Cossack who had flaunted the forbidden color until he fell into the hands of the Tatars, who stripped the skin from his legs and feet and turned him loose on the steppe.

And Ayub thought that this stripling had donned green either because he was ignorant and reckless, or because he was at heart a Moslem, and if so, he was here for no good. Certainly the boy did not belong to the village. Even the Cossack maidens, who loved bright colors, did not wear green.

"YOU minstrel," he cried, "you with the guitar, what's your name?"

"Kirdy," the youth answered at once, without ceasing to run his fingers over the strings of the *bandura*.

"You speak like a Tcherkessian—no, like something else, I don't know what," growled the warrior. "Do you mean to say that you swam the Donetz in flood?"

"Aye, uncle, and the Volga too. But my horse is a good one."

Ayub was silent, thinking of his own horse, and wondering whence the young minstrel had come. Beyond the Volga were the plains and deserts of the Tatar khans. Beyond that, he vaguely imagined vast mountains barring the way to Cathay and Ind—a part of the earth where no Cossack, save one, had ever set foot. This one was an old ataman, Khlit by name, who had taken it into his head to wander into the world under the rising sun, and had never been heard from again.

"I, too," he said reflectively, "once swam a great river. It was the Dneiper, and such a flood you never saw because your mother had not brought you into the world then. At night, too, and no one could see the other bank. My Kabarda jumped in when I lifted the reins, and when we were out in mid-stream a new wall of water as high as this tavern came rushing down."

The villagers who harkened attentively to every word of the Zaporoghian, now gazed at him, open-mouthed.

"It was impossible to get across, impossible to go back," continued Ayub, emptying his glass and stroking his mustaches.

"But my Kabarda was a fine nag. He turned and began to swim down stream, and after I had said a prayer to Saint Nikolas, I sat back and waited for what was to come. *Ekh*, my brothers, it was a fearful night—trees rushing past us, torn up by the flood, and boulders rumbling down underfoot. But my horse did not go down, and after a long, long while he brought me to safety."

"How?" demanded Kukubenko. "I thought you couldn't get out."

"No more we could," the warrior assented. "The stallion swam to something I couldn't see at all. It was a galley, anchored in the river. You see, before then, he had gone out to attack the galleys of the accursed Turks with me, and now he brought me to this one. As I live, good sirs, it was a Turkish craft."

"Then you were gone, sure enough," remarked the cobbler.

"Nay," Ayub assured him gravely," it is well known, if you had come to the Dnieper, now, instead of this devil-infested place, you would have heard yourself, that I once brought a captured Turkish galley up the river. I and my horse."

The simple-minded villagers shook their heads in admiration, and Kirdy with half-closed eyes, swept his hand across the strings of the *bandura*.

"They, who made me bow my head—
"Their heads have I laid low with my sword."

So he sang under his breath, and Ayub, looking at him grimly, was not sure whether he jested or not.

"But, noble sir," objected Kukubenko," were you not blown out of the water with a cannon?"

"Not then, uncle. Another time, when the knights of the Siech were boarding a ship of the sultan, that was my lot. The ship had been firing off cannon like mad. *Pouf-bong!* For hours they had burned powder until they had not a shot or even a bit of chain left. The accursed Turks had fired off all their belt buckles and iron armor, and so they took the rings from their fingers and emptied their wallets of all sorts of spoil—gold crosses and fine jewels."

Ayub considered while Kukubenko filled his glass. Then he sighed and shook his head.

"For, look you, good sirs! Jewels and such-like would have been no use to those Turks after they had lost their heads. So they loaded one great cannon as I have said. And the cannon went off right in front of me. It blew me out of the skiff and I would have drowned if a brave Cossack—Demid, it was—had not fished me out by the scalp lock and put mud and powder on my wounds. The cuts closed up, but whenever I have needed a bit of coin or a jewel to give to a maid, I have taken a knife and cut them open again and taken out some of the charge of that Turkish cannon."

He ceased his boasting and grunted in astonishment. A girl had slippped into the tavern from the dark regions behind the stove.

"Galka!" cried Kukubenko, frowning because she had presumed to show herself to strange warriors.

"Nay, father—" the maiden seized his arm and whispered to him, her bright head with its tinsel circlet, and straw-hued curls pressed against his dark, shaggy locks. Ayub did not finish his story, and Kirdy ceased stroking his guitar, his fingers poised in mid-air. The dark eyes of the youth glowed for an instant and then he paid no attention to Galka as if fair-faced girls did not interest him in the least.

"Hmm!" said the Zaporoghian to himself. "The young minstrel has not seen a lass like this before. That's strange, because girls always crowd around the *bandura* folk like ravens in a corn field."

But Galka was not like the dark-browed, warm blooded maidens of the southland. She was too slender, as if wasted by illness or brooding—only lips and eyes vivid in a bloodless face. Nearly all the color had gone from her once-bright 'kerchief, what with many washings, and her neat *beshmet*, the long smock that all girls wore, was ornamented with many cross-stitchings where it had been torn. And her boots, instead of soft red or green leather, were of stiff horsehide—evidently the work of the cobbler in the corner.

Nevertheless, Ayub watched her, and a pleasant glow went through him. Ten years ago he would have had a lass like Galka out on the clear sand between the benches, dancing. He would have had Kirdy playing a gay tune, and Kukubenko drawing off all the mead in the place. He would have been gloriously drunk.

"—— fly away with you, Kukubenko!" he bellowed, the wooden bench creaking under his weight suddenly. "You don't laugh at a story; you hide your women like a Turk.* What kind of a dog-kennel is this? Strike up, minstrel! Fill up the cups! We can't live forever."

Kirby's white teeth flashed under his dark mustache and his fingers struck out the first, swift notes of a Gypsy song. And then they all heard the shuffling of steps outside, the clank of steel, and the spluttering of a torch. The door was thrust open and Durak entered, bending his head to clear the lintel. Behind him could be seen the steel caps of half a dozen men-at-arms.

AYUB rose, towering against the chimney piece, taking in his right hand the heavy scabbard that he had unshipped while he was drinking. To a man, the villagers bowed low and fastened their eyes on the giant Muscovite who strode over to the tavern-keeper.

One of the *boyars*, the same who had bandied words with Ayub about the river, followed Durak, accompanied by the servant with the torch.

"Ah, *moi batyushka*—little father mine—you have hidden your bright jewel all this weary way!"

So said the *boyar*, and Kukubenko fell to his knees, his head lowered between his hulking shoulders.

"Don't you know, you dolt," went on the *boyar*, "that it's a crime to hide things from your prince? If he had not seen her himself the other day, driving in the cattle—you kept her well hidden on the road in one of your wagons, old fox."

Kukubenko bent his head and managed to say hoarsely—

"If it please His Illustriousness—"

"Well, it does please His Illustriousness, your master," interrupted the noble, "and so you'll get off with a whole back this time. Only make haste and send the girl up to the castle."

On his knees the tavern keeper edged toward the *boyar* and caught in his scarred hands the folds of the soiled purple kaftan. Bending still lower, he kissed the other's muddy shoes. The noble stared down, his red eyelids twitching with the sting of the liquor in him, steam rising from his round crimson face.

"Pardon," said Kukubenko slowly, "it was no fault of mine that the lass was not seen by Your Excellencies. She was ill—you know young girls fall ill on a long journey like that. She's my daughter."

Perhaps the sight of his own rags made the stout Muscovite angry. His good-nature vanished, and he shouted to Durak to take Galka along and have done.

"It's no fault of yours, you say, *moujik!* You peasants think you're landowners—when a cow drops a fine calf you hide it, and show a skeleton instead! I'll eat with the dogs if your old woman hasn't pieces of gold and silver tucked away in her stocking this minute. No, it isn't your fault at all! When we send for wine, you take a cask of mead up to the castle and save the *gorilka* to pour down your own stems."

Going over to the table, he lifted Ayub's half filled mug of corn brandy, sniffed at it, and drank it.

"It's as I said, you dog! And now— —— save us!"

Galka had remained perfectly quiet, her gray eyes fastened on her father, while the *boyar* was pronouncing judgment. But when Durak put his hand on her arm she wrenched free and darted at the sleepy servant with the torch. Snatching the blazing brand from him, she beat the stout *boyar* over the head with it, sending sparks and hot coals showering all over him.

With a barbed oath he jumped back, clawing at neck and shoulders. Running up to Durak, the girl struck at him, but the captain of the guards thrust out his shield and the brand was knocked from her hand.

Durak held her fast while he unbuckled his belt and proceeded to lash her wrists together behind her back. This was too much for Ayub who had never before played the part of a spectator when a broil was in progress. A strong belief that the *boyar* would order him cut down or trussed up had kept him in the deep shadow by the chimney, where the wandering gaze of the Muscovite had not identified him. Now he was beginning to fidget and snort.

"Look here, brother," he lifted one of the kneeling villagers, "take up the benches, shout your war cry and we'll make crow's meat of these chaps."

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*Cossacks did not seclude their women, who were high-spirited and well able to take care of themselves; the Muscovites of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries did not allow their wives and daughters to be seen by any one outside the household, as a rule.

The man twisted up a face pallid with fear.

"Oh, as you love Christ, do not lift a hand. The prince is our lord."

"How, your lord?"

"It would be sin to lift hand. Besides, he would take the cattle and hang some of us up. Then the old folks and the brats would starve."

"Well, your mother bore you once, you can't live forever," grumbled the Cossack who could not understand the other's fear, but realized now that these men would not take up weapons against Vladimir. He glanced at the minstrel, and then a second time, thoughtfully.

Kirdy had shouldered his guitar and was pouring water on the smoking head of the *boyar*. This accomplished, the boy put a hand on his hip, smiling.

"Good sir, is the noble prince out of humor? Does he toss on his bed, sleepless? I can sing of the deeds of the old heroes—aye, of the falcon ship that sailed without a wind, or of Rurik the Fair who slew in his day a host of Moslem knights. I can relate the wonders of the court of the Moghul, or Prester John who lives in a gold tent beyond the roof of the world—"

The *boyar* grunted and chewed his lip.

"Vladimir can not sleep that is true. Are you a *koldun*—a conjurer, to know that."

"Nay, the *bandura* man must know all things."

"Come along then—put the prince to sleep. You'll wish yourself in purgatory if you cross him."

They filed out into the darkness, lacking a torch. Kukubenko did not rise. His shoulders heaved in a sigh, and presently he went to stir up the fire. His task half finished, he sat down heavily, his chin propped in his mighty fists. The cobbler put away his wooden last and his knife.

AYUB'S merry-making had come to a sorry end. His broad, good-natured face was troubled as he watched the men who sat in the tavern without so much as a word between them. So might one of the massive *ovtchai*, the gray wolf hound, have sat on his haunches among sheep dogs, puzzled by the sights and smells around him, eager to be off on the trail again.

Such a fine little one, Galka was. Fire enough in her veins! How she had basted the *boyar* on the noodle with the torch! Ayub chuckled aloud and then sighed. Like a heavy mantle, the silence of the northern men enveloped and oppressed him.

A woman entered the room from behind the stove—a bent form, lean with the stoic strength of age and toil, her head hidden in a black 'kerchief. She crept over to Kukubenko and stooped to whisper to him, brushing back a gray lock of hair from her eyes. Then, kneeling by the tavern-keeper, she began to rock back and forth, groaning shrilly and clasping her hands against her wasted breast.

From time to time her bony fingers went up to her face, as if to claw it. The helpless bleating of this mother, aged before her time, was too much for the Zaporoghian to endure.

"I can't stay here," he muttered to himself. "I'll go out on the plain, by ——, and sleep."

Rising, he sought the kegs of spirits in the corner by the cobbler, sniffing them until his experienced nose indentified the best *gorilka*. From this cask of corn brandy he filled a stone jug. Then he ripped the purse from his belt, tossing it into the lap of Kukubenko, who did not look up or cease stirring the dead ashes of the fire.

"God keep you, good folk," he said and drew a sigh of relief when the tavern lights were left behind.

He did not take the trail that led back to the castle, but struck out past the cattle-pens to the open steppe, going toward the moon that was sinking into the mist. Like an orange lantern, it hung in front of his eyes, lighting up the stems of tall grass, glinting on the surface of a hidden pool. When he stopped for a moment to choose his path, the myriad sounds of the night swelled louder in his ears—the pulsating rasp of grasshoppers, the buzzing of gnats and the distant crying of wild geese, startled by something or other.

A thousand glow-worms beaded the grass and the scent of the river with its forest of rushes filled his nostrils. Hearing and seeing all this, the warrior nodded to himself gravely.

"A good place, the steppe."

Then he drew in his breath sharply and rubbed his eyes. The moon, half full, was sinking behind a mound on the plain. The high grass was clearly to be seen, and, rising from it, the black outline of a man.

Ayub could not tell how far away the figure was. It loomed gigantic one instant and looked small as a dwarf the next, in that elusive glow from the sky. The figure wore no hat, but the orange rays gleamed on its head as if it had been polished steel. A long cloak concealed its limbs.

Its head was bent forward as if looking into the gloom or listening to the multitudinous sounds of the night. To Ayub's fancy it might have been the spirit of the steppe, incarnate—lord of waste places, ruler of darkness.

Or, he reasoned, it might be the spirit of some Tatar khan, arising from its age-old bed in the burial mound.

"Perhaps it is the arch-fiend himself," he muttered between his teeth, without feeling any fear.

He had had quite a bit of spirits down his throat, and after the dark deeds he had beheld in the settlement, what was more to be expected than that Satan should have come to look at his own?

"In the name of the Father and Son!" he shouted. "Away with you! Devil, you can't terrify the soul of a Cossack."

At once the figure vanished from the mound, and the moon was once more to be seen, glowing over the grass. Ayub uncorked the jug, and, following a custom of which he himself knew not the meaning or origin, lifted it to the four quarters of the earth.

"To the Faith—to all the sir brothers, Cossacks—wherever they may be in the world."

Then he stroked down his long mustaches, lifted the jug in both hands, and threw back his head. After a long moment he sighed and tossed the jug away, empty. Stretching himself out full length in the grass, he spread his coat over his chest, pushed his lambskin hat under his head and began to snore almost at once, oblivious of the evil wrought by a prince who was not at peace in his own soul, of the loss of his horse, and of the presence of a village in the wilderness where no village should be.

Nevertheless, his sleep was broken. Voices penetrated his hearing. The voices belonged to two good Zaporoghians and were close to him and quiet. He turned over and was sure that he heard a Tatar war-cry—*ghar-ghar-ghar!*

III

Distance tries the horse's strength—Time the strength of man.—Kirghiz Proverb.

THE cry echoed in Ayub's ears until he roused himself, certain that Tatars were rushing on him. Instead, he beheld Kirdy squatting beside him, the rein of a piebald pony over his arm. It was the hour before dawn and the whole eastern sky was alight.

"The Tatars—"

"I am the Tatar. It was the only way to wake you, Uncle Ayub. I tried everything. Now you must listen to me because I have far to ride."

The high grass, waving under the fresh breeze that comes with sunrise, hemmed them in. The young minstrel's face was flushed, and his coat and *kalpak* glistened with dew. Ayub saw that his eyes were coal black and slanted at the corners—the eyes of a man with Mongol blood in him.

Another thing he noticed was that the glow in the sky flickered, and shot up as if the reeds by the river were afire.

"Did you sing the prince to sleep?" he yawned.

"Vladimir did not sleep last night. The Tatars came."

Ayub's jaws clicked together, and his drowsiness vanished.

"—— burn this Muscovite drink! Then there was a fight—"

"Nay, there was only a little fight."

Getting up to his knees Ayub beheld dark clouds of smoke rising over the trees where the hamlet of Sirog was—or had been. The glare of flames beat into his eyes, and he heard now a far-off crackling that he had taken to be the wind in the reeds.

"We were near the river gate of the castle," went on the minstrel, "when a *chambul* of Tatars swept on us. They speared the *boyar* and three men, but Durak broke through with his ax and gained the gate. We heard other Tatars at work in the village—"

"And you—what were you doing?" growled the warrior.

Kirdy smiled and shook his dark head.

"I tried to carry off the maiden, when the Muscovites were cut down. What availed it? A lance raked my ribs and my sword blade snapped. They bore her off and I ran to seek my horse."

His green *sharivar* were stained with

blood, but Ayub drew a long breath when he looked at the boy's side. A leather scabbard had been thrust through the black sash, a scabbard stamped with strange lettering and strengthened with bronze. From it projected a hilt, not of horn or of iron, but ivory inlaid with gold. It curved, Moslem-fashion. Such a weapon might be worn by the khan of the Golden Horde.*

Without a word the Cossack reached out and drew the sword from the scabbard. The blade was whole—an arc of blue steel, unstained and sharpened to a razor edge. The flicker of the distant flames ran along its length, illumining a line of writing, worked in gold. This writing was not Turkish, nor was it any Christian tongue.

Ayub thought that it was an uncommon youth who could take his horse from the stables and ride out of a Tatar raid.

"Your sword was—broken," he said slowly.

"This—" Kirdy hesitated a little—"was given me."

"Hmm. Who was the Tatar?"

"Ghirei Khan, of the Nogais, made the raid. I saw his white horse when the tavern was burning."

An old foe of the Siech was Ghirei Khan, and a valiant man. Ayub knew that the Tatar was shrewd as a steppe fox. And he thought that the boy had a wise head on him to see so much when swords were out and flames were roaring.

"Did the prince beat him off?" he asked.

Kirdy was silent for the time that water takes to boil. When he spoke, his accent was so marked that the Cossack barely understood him.

"*In'shalum bak Allah.* God forbid I should judge where I have little wisdom. I did not see the prince or his men. It may be they were too late, or Ghirei-ka hemmed them in. But the Tatars cut down the villagers who took weapons in their hands. They slew many, taking some for captives—the young lads and maidens for slaves. They drove off all the cattle and sheep."

Ayub eyed the piebald pony attentively. It was, as the minstrel had said, a good horse.

"And whither do you ride?"

The youth looked up quickly.

"After the maiden, Galka. I will bring her back from the Tatars."

All this while Ayub had been revolving things in his mind. Kirdy was not like the *bandura* players he had known—too young for one thing. The boy had come from beyond the frontier; his speech was strange. Stranger still, he had emerged from a Tatar raid with almost a whole skin, with a horse and a sword worth a noble's ransom. Now he proposed to cross the river in the path of the Tatars, which was a good way to die immediately, unless he was known to the raiders.

Was he a spy? Had he come to Sirog to measure the strength of Prince Vladimir? Yet, if he were a foeman, why should he linger to talk to Ayub?

"Look here, my lad," said Ayub bluntly. "We shared bread and salt at the tavern, that's a fact. But when you say Prince Vladimir turned his back and picked his nose while a Tatar *chambul* raided his villagers, I believe you're lying like a dog. The prince may be half a devil, but he's an orthodox Christian like myself, and no coward. So I think you're a spy, and that's the long and short of it."

Kirdy's dark head went up and he drew a breath between clenched teeth. Both men reached for their swords, the youth more swiftly than the big warrior. Both were on their knees, their movements hampered by the dense growth around them.

The minstrel did not raise his weapon. No sooner had his hand closed on the hilt than the curved blade sprang from the scabbard. His arm darted forward and to the right, and the scimitar gleamed under Ayub's chin.

Death's scent was in Ayub's nostrils as he flung himself to the left, crashing full length on his back. The razor edge of the scimitar did no more than touch his *kalpak*.

Lying so, he saw Kirdy bending over him, saw the boy's face, pale and twitching, the black eyes burning. In the brush behind him a horse stamped and some one growled a word of reproof. Kirdy, as if struck by an arrow, remained motionless while the big Cossack tried doggedly to free the broad-sword upon which he was lying.

Then, to Ayub's astonishment, the boy thrust the curved sword back in its scabbard and put his foot on the pommel of the Cossack's weapon. He cried out something in a language Ayub did not understand, and added under his breath, "Nay, between us must be peace!"

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*The Tatars of the Golden Horde were a branch of the Mongol-Tatars who conquered Russia in the time of Kublai Khan. Their chief was called the Altyn Khan or Golden Khan, and their descendants today are the Kiptchaks, or "desert people."

"You give me life?" Ayub scowled up at him. "By the five wounds, I'll take naught from the hand of a Moslem."

The boy's set lips smiled, though the veins still stood out on his forehead.

"I am no Moslem."

Sitting up, Ayub beheld his cap lying on the ground, cut in two. "Well, you are no minstrel either. Who taught you that cross-stroke with the blade? What are you, then?"

The blood flowed back into Kirdy's lean cheeks and he withdrew his foot from Ayub's sword, standing a moment in silence while the anger of the two men cooled.

"SIR brother, it is true I am no *bandura* player. I have come from afar through many enemies, and a minstrel may go where a warrior would meet only sword strokes.

"I was born in the tents of the Golden Horde, in the sands of the Gobi, beyond the mountains that you call the roof of the world. My mother was a princess, of the line of Kublai Khan. She had the right to bear with her wherever she might go the gold *yarligh* and to sit on the white horse skin. Before I had backed a horse she and my father were slain by tribesmen who raided down from the mountains. A servant hid me in a cart and so I was not carried off a slave.

"My grandsire was a *bogatyr*, a hero. Alone among men he entered the tomb of Tchingis Khan in the pine forest where the Kerulon flows, in the land of the Five Rivers. He carried hence the yak-tail Standard of the Mongol Horde, and with it in his hand, he made war against the emperors of Cathay. But my grandfather was old, and the Horde was no more than a scabbard from which the blade has been drawn. He took me into his tent and taught me how to handle a sword.

"He taught me many things, but not by words. When theCathayans searched for us, we drew our reins toward the passes in the southern mountains,* and these we crossed in regions where the snow lay and the winds were very strong. A good swordsman, Chauna Singh, of the tribe called Rajputs gave us aid. He had a fine beard and knew a horse when he saw one. He served Jahangir, the Moghul of Ind.

"So we also took service with the Moghul, and crossed swords more than once with the Moslems. Yet there was one Moslem who was a *bogatyr*. He was Abdul Dost, and he taught me how to steal horses and lie in wait for a caravan. I was old enough to follow him in battle, but not old enough to have men to my command.

"Once I think we saved the life of the Moghul of Ind in a war against the Uzbeks, and many were slain. But my grandfather tired of the Moghul's court, because there he made many enemies who were always close at hand, and not in a distant camp that could be watched. There were women who plotted against him, smiling at him because he had found favor with the Moghul, but whispering and stirring up the *mansabdars* of the throne against him.

"I, and others with me, begged my grandfather to go before Jahangir, the Lord of the World, the Moghul, and justify himself. But he would not go. He said that once a man might justify himself with words, but not a second time. Besides, he was very weary of the court.

"So we went at night and led out the best of our horses, taking no more than that with us, for we could not. Aye, many fine pieces of armor and hangings of silk and coral-work and weapons we left behind in the palace grounds of Balkh where the Moghul lay.

"Again we drew our reins toward the mountain passes to the north. We carried grain for our horses in saddle bags, because snow had put an end to grazing. On the other side of the mountains we found a land of rolling, green valleys where the people did not live in tents, but in clay houses, and had a great deal of cattle. The horses, too, were good. When we reached a wide river with ships that bore masts and sails, my grandfather said that he had been in this place before. He called it Khorosan*. It was not a good place for us, because the people were turbaned folk—Moslems.

"Though the grazing was good we had to press on, my grandfather pretending that he was blind, and I saying that I was a cup-companion, a teller of tales from the court of the Moghul. We followed the river and it led us to a city on a sea where all the shore was gray with salt. Aye, we crossed a desert of gray salt where we found no grazing at all, and the caravan beasts were camels.

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*The Himalayas.

*Now northern Persia.

"In the city my grandfather talked with men who had thin beards and wore dirty caps and seemed always to be afraid. When they heard what my grandfather wanted they feared the more, but they took from us the last of our gold. They were called Jews. When a Jew passed a Turkish grandee in the street, the Moslem would snatch off the Jew's cap and spit in it and put it back on again.

"My grandfather, the *bogatyr*, wanted to be placed on a ship with the horses, to go across the sea. He had begun to feel his age, and his joints were stiff. At that time he would sit against the wall of a house and talk to me about his home. He had never done this before.

"So I learned that his people were all knights who cared not about trade, but fought the Turks and the Tatars. My grandfather's people were the Kazaki—Cossacks of your tribe.

"He said that the brotherhood of Cossacks never left the war camps, but when they had taken gold or fine jewels in plunder, they would give it all to the musicians, to play and the girls to dance, and hold revelry. Now, when he felt death standing near him, he desired above all things to see the Cossack steppe again, and to greet the warriors, his brothers, so that the minstrels would know of his deeds and his name would not be lost to fame, but would be sung from camp to camp in the steppe.

"And the Jews, greatly fearing, put us on a ship. For a month we sailed across that sea toward the *Jitti-karachi*, the Great Bear in the sky.* Then the shores closed in on us, and we passed up a river, where only reeds and the wagon-tents of the Tatars were to be seen.

"When we set foot on land again the bellies of our horses were drawn up into their ribs. But the eyes of the *bogatyr*, my grandfather, were bright and he shouted and plied his whip. For days we sped on through the tall grass, avoiding the Tatar *auls* and swimming the freshets. We swam the Donetz, and my grandfather began to quiver all over, like an eager horse, when he saw the roofs of the village of Sirog and the men going in and out of the castle.

"But after we had come up to the gate he said to me that these were not Cossacks, because the Cossacks were free men without masters, and he had seen the banner of the prince. So we kept our saddles."

"We stopped after a while, and my grandfather sat down because he was weary, and because he was grieved at finding strangers where he had looked for the sir brothers, Cossacks. I went back to the tavern for meat and wine, and there I met you, sir brother."

* * *

SO SPOKE the young Mongol prince, and Ayub meditated upon his tale with lowered eyes, finding in it truth and not falsehood. The Cossack warrior remembered the man he had seen outlined against the moon the night before, and remembered too the Cossack voices that he had heard when he was stretched out drunk. And he was deeply ashamed that an elder Cossack, a *bogatyr*, whose renown had traveled over all the steppe from the Black Sea to Moscow, should have seen him drunk when Tatars were burning and pillaging near at hand.

"*Ekh*," he said at length, "you are mistaken, Kirdy. The fame of your grandsire has not been unvoiced, his deeds have not been forgotten. The gray-haired *bandura* players have sung of him and children have heard his name. It is in my mind that your grandsire is the *koshevoi ataman* of the Zaporoghian Cossacks, who was called the Wolf. Khlit of the Curved Saber, so his enemies named him."

"That is true," assented Kirdy. "And this is his sword. He gave it to me last night when mine was broken. A Tatar or Mongol would have known it at once for the blade of Kaidu, the rider of the white horse.

Ayub nodded soberly. He had heard of such a sword, but had never set eyes on it before.

"Take me to the *koshevoi*, so that I may hold him in my arms. Eh, he was a hero, and there are not such in the Siech today."

Kirdy glanced up at the sun and shook his head.

"Nay, he is far away by now. Come, there is much to be done—if you trust me."

Rising to his full height, Ayub stretched himself until his bones cracked, then shouldered his sword, and flung an arm around Kirdy.

"Nay, youngling, when you are older you will know that it is ill work rousing one who has been fighting the bear—drunk."

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*This must have been the Caspian, and the river the Volga.

Instead of mounting his horse, Kirdy walked beside the older man, his courtesy forebearing to sit in the saddle while Ayub was afoot. As for the Zaporoghian, he eyed the youth sidewise, taking account of the dark brows, the clear, quick moving eyes and the stalwart neck.

"He's a swordsman, no doubt of that," he thought with pleasure. "He's tall and plain-spoken, and he led a horse out under the spears of a Tatar *chambul.* —— take me if we don't make a good Cossack out of him. Only I hope Khlit put this plan in his head—the lad's unfledged yet, for making a plan, and —— knows my head isn't suited for such things."

IV

PRINCE VLADIMIR had not slept that night. When his sentinels had brought word of the Tatar attack, he had left the massive chests of gold-and-silver plate where he had been making a tally of his possessions with the aid of a sleepy clerk and had himself given the alarm. For hours his retainers had stood under arms while Vladimir, in a tower of the blockhouse, watched the sacking and burning of the village a musket shot away.

Not until dawn, when the last of the riders had disappeared toward the river, did the prince give command to open the gate in the palisade and sally forth. His arqubusiers went out, carrying lighted matches, and the *boyars* went with a strong guard of pikemen, but Vladimir was attended only by Durak, the clerk, and the priest who had come with him from Moscow.

He merely glanced at the smoldering and charred walls of the tavern, the demolished huts and the broken cattle-pens. He did not go out to the fields where horses had trodden down the tender barley and wheat. Instead, he went from one body to another commanding Durak to turn each one over and identify it.

There were many bodies and few living souls in the hamlet of Sirog. Old women, who had flocked together, dry-eyed and voiceless, kneeled as he went by, mounted on the black Kabarda. Boys, who had run out into the steppe and so had escaped the Tatar lances, took off their caps. To all these Vladimir spoke, asking the names of the slain. He even bade Durak's men-at-arms rake over the débris of the larger buildings to see if any bodies had been buried in the ruins.

The *boyars* soon went back to the castle because the penetrating odor of hot ashes and blood was distasteful to them, but Vladimir kept at his task with feverish eagerness, watching to see that the clerk marked down all the names of the dead on a long roll of paper.

An hour later they came across the forms of the cobbler, and his sons in the trail well on toward the river.

"Mark down Ivashko, and his sons," Durak growled to the clerk. "See, they took cudgels in their hands, and so they were spitted."

"*Deus eos accipe,*" murmured Vladimir. "God receive their souls."

The captain of the men-at-arms glanced up at his lord bleakly, as if wondering why His Illustriousness bothered his head about so many peasants.

"The tally is complete, Serene Highness," vouchsafed the clerk.

"How many?"

"Fifty-three, please you, my lord."

Vladimir motioned him to give the list of names to the priest. "Here, father—these names must be prayed for, *per diem,* in perpetuity. As a whole and by individuals, by Mother Church. At Easter candles must be burned." He considered a moment. "Will five hundred and thirty gold ducats be a sum sufficient?"

The priest, with down-cast eyes, took the list and bowed.

"Yet there is no altar and, save for the *ikona* at the castle—"

"Tomorrow we begin the march to Moscow. There the sum will be paid down." Again Vladimir hesitated, fingering his lip.

"Nay, I doubt me that it suffices. Ten garments of cloth-of-gold, with pearls sewn therein will I give the holy images in the Kremyl."

He glanced at the haze of smoke that still hung over Sirog.

"It is manifest, is it not, father, that I am now relieved of my oath to abide by and protect the dogs of serfs on the border?"

Durak, the voiceless, uttered a croaking sound that might have been a laugh.

"Cattle gone, wenches gone, brats gone—only *kolduns,* only magicians, could rebuild the village."

"Aye, my lord prince," acknowledged the

priest to whom exile in the steppe was as abhorrent as to Vladimir, "it is manifest. Will you return to bend the knee at court?"

Vladimir, hands crossed on the saddle pommel, bade the clerk read over the list again, and when he had done, remarked:

"Kukubenko's Galka is not set down. What became of her?"

Durak pointed up the trail.

"There are twain who can give my lord some word of the lass."

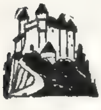
The two Cossacks had appeared. They were on foot, Kirdy limping to favor his injured side, Ayub flushed and breathing heavily. At sight of him the stallion had neighed and started forward, only to be restrained by a dig of the spurs. The Zaporoghian stifled a groan, because he had never used spurs on the horse, and he could see plainly that the Kabarda had not been rubbed down or fed that morning. The silver cross on the chest strap that all Cossack horses wore had been taken off, and now the reins had been ornamented with rows of tiny gold crosses in the Muscovite fashion.

When the warriors doffed their caps at his stirrup, Vladimir studied them from under bent brows, his head craned forward from his shoulders. Some slight deformity of the back made it impossible for him to hold it upright, and this painful poise of the head may have made its mark on the man's mind, for the young prince had a restless spirit, beset by black moods that were like evil demons tormenting him with the pangs of conscience.

"Can you lead me back to the Dnieper?" he asked.

"If God wills," responded Ayub, thinking that the prince must have changed his mind about the river. Even a Muscovite could see now that this was no place for a settlement.

"Well, take service with me. Only see that you obey orders."



PRINCE VLADIMIR was new to the frontier; he had heard that the Cossacks were vagabonds—masterless men, sprung from fugitives, soldiers, Tatars, Gipsies and whatnot. Since they acknowledged no masters, they were in his eyes no better than the slaves that deserted the estates of the *boyars* in Muscovy. He did not know that in these plainsmen there ran sometimes the blood of nobles.

"We serve a Cossack *ataman*," said Kirdy gravely.

"I'll pay you for your horse, tall ruffian."

Ayub shook his head.

Now Prince Vladimir was not the man to take a refusal from two wanderers. Yet he needed them to guide him into settled country, and it fell in with his mood to humor them a bit. He bade them follow him to the castle, and this they did—Ayub's eye ever on the stallion, Kirdy occupied with thoughts of his own. Near the end of the trail where the ground sloped up sharply the Cossacks halted in surprize.

All the space at one side of the palisade had been dug up. The black earth lay in heaps as high as a man's head and between the mounds were great pits. Ayub thought first that the Muscovites had been making a ditch around the wooden wall, then he wondered if they were burying their dead.

But the bones that littered the ground were dry, and here and there he saw the skull of a horse. The rotting shaft of a spear had been flung aside carelessly and rusted iron arrowheads lay among the stones. The knoll was nothing but a great cemetery, except where the palisade had been built.

"In other days," explained the prince, "a battle was fought in this place. Merchants up the river told me of it, and I have dug out enough gold to line the walls of a palace."

Ayub thought of the goblets and plate he had seen on the boyars' tables, and the chests that had been standing in the corner by Vladimir's bed.

"You twain shall have your share, and you shall not lack thereby—I pledge my word."

Covertly the big Zaporoghian reached up and touched the cross on his sword. It was ill doing, to his mind, to meddle with bodies under the earth. Kirdy, who had seen the digging in progress the day before, made no comment, and there fell a silence that was broken by the prince, who still sought to win the warriors to his service.

"What was the fate of the tavern girl—she who fared with you to my gate?"

"Since she is fair of face, my lord," responded Kirdy, "the Tatars would not take her life, but would sell her to the Turks for a slave."

A gesture as of tossing something lightly from his fingers, and Vladimir sighed.

"I would have given a hundred silver crowns for her."

"Sir prince," said the youth earnestly, "I will free her and bring her to this place unharmed."

"Now by all the saints," Vladimir smiled at Durak, "here is a minstrel of deeds as well as words. But surely that is a mad thought. The raiders will be fifty versts away—see, the sun is at the zenith."

"Not with sheep, lord prince," spoke up Ayub. "They were driving cattle, too. When a Tatar raids, it is like this: They ride at night, two horses to each man in the horde. They go far into Christian lands, molesting no village, like ghosts riding to the Devil's summons. At dawn they turn, spreading out on each wing, making a long net that closes around the *stanitzas*. You have seen what they do to the fold of a village. They put the children in hampers and mount the captives on the led horses. Before you can say a prayer to the Father and Son, they are across the river again."

Pointing through the haze of smoke at the gray ribbon of the Donetz, he added:

"But Ghirei Khan knows that you haven't horses, and he will take his time. Only God knows how he got the sheep across—maybe in carts, maybe he just drove them in to drown—still, he's not more than a dozen versts away."

There was bitterness in his voice and harsh accusation in his bleared eyes. Ayub had looked over Vladimir's forces as only an experienced soldier can, and he saw that the prince had a score of arquebusiers with good weapons, thirty pikemen, and as many under Durak, besides the boyars and the servitors—nearly a hundred and fifty in all, with two brass cannon. Enough to have driven the Tatars out of the village, had the prince advanced at once to the aid of his peasants.

"Give me a horse, my lord," put in Kirdy quickly, "and I will bring back the maiden."

For a moment the prince considered, staring into the dark eyes of the wanderer. He would give much to have Galka again—

"You will return here, minstrel?"

"Aye. Only remember that we serve the *ataman*."

Vladimir shrugged. "Serve the devil if you will—but come back. You are young for the embrace of Mother Death."

Some minutes later Kirdy was leading a sorrel pony toward the thicket near the river bank where he had tethered the piebald—his own horse. Here they were out of sight of those who watched from the castle, and they mounted in silence, urging their beasts into the gray flood of the Donetz, kneeling in their saddles to keep dry above the waist.

"That is an ill place," grumbled the Zaporoghian. "No good ever came of meddling with graveyards, that's a fact. Only, now, it will be worse for us with the Tatars. You ought to take off those trousers, by the saints. If Ghirei Khan gets the upper hand, he'll crucify you and make dog collars out of your hide, and as for me—"

Shaking his head gloomily, Ayub meditated on what the tribesmen might do to him.

"Stratagems are all very well," he went on, "as long as your enemy's at a distance. Trick him all you like as long as your sword point's in between, but don't put your head in the bear's mouth and then kick him in the belly by way of a stratagem."

Kirdy, humming a saddle song under his breath, let the piebald out on the level plain of grass, and Ayub, still grumbling, hastened after him.

V

When the sun is high the lion roars unheeded: when night covers the earth men harken to the howling of a wolf."—Tatar Proverb.

GHIREI KHAN could not count above a hundred, and when, after some calculation, he decided that he was the richer by half a hundred captives and a good many more than a hundred cows, he was not altogether satisfied. He could not get a good price for the peasants from the Turkish slave traders and he did not want them himself. Not so much as a fistful of gold or silver had come out of the raid, and he began to think he had ridden away from Sirog too quickly. His spies had told him that Muscovite warriors were camped near at hand—and the Tatar always kept his distance from the ruined castle.

While his men made ready to feast on the sheep they had slaughtered and carried along in the peasants' carts, Ghirei Khan sat on a horse skin in a grassy valley by a stream and meditated.

He had a round head, a stub of a nose and eyes that were like black beads. They gleamed angrily when he looked at the groups of Christians who sat wearily in the sun, their hands hanging over their knees.

Mounted Tatars paced around them—short-legged riders in polished mail—holding long lances with tufts of painted hair under the steel points.

Ghirei Khan had put aside his armor, and his thick body was resplendent in an orange *khalat* with sleeves too long for his stumpy arms. But either arm could wield with fury and skill the scimitar that lay across his knees. His men feared his anger, his enemies his craftiness. For the Nogai chieftain had lived long on the border, and the sparse red hairs under his chin that did duty for a beard were turning gray.

While the mutton was cooking in the pots he ate sunflower seeds, taking them from the hand of a warrior kneeling beside him—and counted over the prisoners again.

His slant eyes rested momentarily on Galka, who had covered her face and huddled up against gaunt Kukubenko. Then, at the tread of approaching horses, he looked up and resumed his chewing. Six Nogais were bringing in two Cossacks—one as big as an ox, the other slender, a born horseman. The weapons of the Cossacks were in the hands of the Nogais, but Ghirei Khan saw at once there had been no struggle.

"Exalted of Allah, lord of lances, lord of the plain and the river, bearer of the sword of Islam—" one of the Tatar riders began the usual salutation.

"Who are these sons of dogs?" exclaimed the khan.

"They are envoys, they say."

"From the Muscovite pigs?"

"Nay," put in Kirdy, who had understood the remarks, "we come from a *koshevoi ataman* of the Cossacks, from the one called Khlit, of the Curved Sabre."

Ghirei Khan stopped chewing and the red hairs on his chin bristled. His memory was good and not so long ago this same Khlit had brought fire and sword against the Nogais. "How many men has he? From what quarter does he ride?"

Kirdy seated himself by the fire and stared into it while the tribesmen watched his face attentively.

"He will come, Ghirei Khan, to your *kibitka* when the shadows grow long. And he will come alone. He has no weapon but there are words that must pass between you twain. You can see we are not mounted for war, otherwise we would not have given up our arms."

Outwardly impassive, Ayub held his breath until his lungs burned in his chest; while he waited to see what the khan would do. Their lives hung in the balance, and he was afraid that Kirdy might grow anxious and urge again that they were envoys and so, according to the custom of the steppe, inviolate from harm.

"What message do you bring?"

"The *ataman* demands that you do not ill-treat the captives, for they are to be freed."

When the Nogai said nothing more, Ayub sighed with relief and stared about him with interest. Never before had he been in the camp of Tatars and his experienced eye took in the horse lines, the orderly groups around the fires—the riders who came as near as they dared to the chieftain to inspect the Cossacks. After a while the khan gave an order and warriors trotted out of the ravine—to double the guards, Ayub reflected, because none came in again. Also, the men at the fires did not eat their fill, but sat or walked about with bows strung and lances in hand.

Nevertheless, Khlit came in without being seen by the guards. He walked his horse down the bed of the stream, and Ayub knew it was he because he wore no sword and because he was older than any Cossack in the Siech.

GHIREI KHAN put one stumpy hand on the hilt of his scimitar, and the other on the leather sheath, and his black eyes were no longer beads, but pin points of fire. His voice rumbled in his chest.

"What word have you, who have not an hour to live, to speak to me, O *Kazak*?"

Khlit dismounted and loosened the girth on his pony before coming to the fire and squatting down a spear's length from the Tatar, apparently not noticing that a warrior led his horse away and others crowded in behind him.

"You have mare's milk, Ghirei Khan," he said. "Give me some."

The unblinking gaze of the Tatar was fixed on his old foe. He decided at once that Khlit was unarmed. No knife was in the black girdle around the Cossack's lean waist, and no pistol sagged the pockets of the sheepskin coat that was thrown loosely over his bowed shoulders. Age had thinned the once massive body of the veteran *ataman*, hollowing the flesh under the cheekbones.

Ghirei Khan grunted with satisfaction. Not for the best pony in his herds would he have exchanged this Cossack who had come, afflicted perhaps with the madness that besets the very old, under his hand, to be tortured or slain as he saw fit.

He bent forward to scrutinize his guest, and grunted again. Khlit's attire had changed—under the sheepskin he wore no more than a red shirt, once brilliant but now faded by the sun. He had no tall Cossack *kalpak*. But the gray mustaches that fell to his bare chest, and the somber eyes that peered out under grizzled brows were the same.

With a quick movement of the wrist Ghirei Khan unsheathed his scimitar.

"Many winters have covered the steppe since we have spoken together, O *Kazak*, and is this the only word you have for me?"

Khlit nodded, and Ayub, who could already feel in imagination the lances of the Tatars between his ribs, glanced at Kirdy. The young warrior was apparently not listening at all—he lay on his side, drawing lines and circles in the sandy soil with a stick. Outside the ring of tribesmen, the village Cossacks, who had started up hopefully at sight of the Zaporoghian, returned to their seats by the stream.

"Then hear my word!" The lips of the Nogai drew back from his white teeth. "Your grave will be dug here. Infidel—dog—I will drive my horses over you, and jackals will litter over your bones."

"Eh, I'll have better burial than your fathers."

Blood darkened the Nogai's forehead and his hand quivered on the sword.

"I have seen their graves dug up, Ghirei Khan. Their bodies are no longer covered—nay, their bodies are kicked about."

"*Bak Allah!*" cried the Nogai involuntarily. "God forbid! But that is surely a lie."

When Khlit remained silent, curiosity began to temper his rage.

"What grave have you seen?"

"At Sirog the Muscovites have uncovered the burial-place."

Ghirei Khan took time to consider this. In reality, the Nogai tribesmen knew little of Sirog. But tradition persisted among them that their ancestors had been masters of the steppe and that the dead in the mound by the river were of their race. In any event the act of the Muscovites was an everlasting insult to a devout Muhammadan, and he considered this also, drawing a conclusion from it that brought small comfort to Ayub.

"*Insh'allah*—as God wills. Then I will crucify the three of you, setting the posts where the unbelieving swine, your kindred, can see them."

Khlit glanced at him fleetingly and his mustaches twitched into a smile.

"Do you want the women of the Nogai to point their fingers at you, and the children to shout after you?"

The Tatar was becoming more and more surprized, and he thought again that the *ataman* must have lost his senses.

"What words are these words?"

"Truth, Ghirei Khan. The women would mock you, saying that when the bodies of Sirog were uncovered, you turned your back and fled like a wolf, because the Muscovites had cannon."

Meanwhile Kirdy, who had been weighing the moods of the chieftain, spoke quickly:

"Many a gold goblet and an ivory sword hilt—many a chain of silver did the Muscovites take from the mound of Sirog."

"How much gold?"

"One horse could not carry the load of it—two horses could not carry the silver."

Ghirei Khan began to calculate on his fingers and this took him some time. When he had finished his eyes were open and he no longer clutched the sword.

"It is clear to me, O *caphar*," he said reflectively, "that you would like to set a trap for me. You are trying to lead me back across the river."

At this Khlit chuckled, deep in his throat.

"I have known the time, Ghirei Khan, when you did not fear a *chambul* of the Moskyas."

"By the ninety-and-nine holy names, I do not fear them. O Khlit, you have seen me drive the folk of the villages like sheep—even Cossacks."

Ayub stirred uneasily, but seeing that his companions were silent, suppressed a hot retort. It was true that Ghirei Khan was a daring raider, wily and experienced, and the Cossacks of the Siech respected him for these qualities.

"But," the Tatar added, "there are more than a hundred Moskyas and I have not a hundred. *Hei-a*, they are behind walls with cannon. I would break my teeth on that place. I grow old, Khlit, and it is more pleasant to sit in the smoke of my *yurt* fire than to carry a torch."

"No need," said Khlit bluntly. "Take back these captives, and exchange them with the khan of the Moskyas for gold and silver. Ghirei Khan, you would redeem the lives of your men with gold—is the Moskya prince less than you? The way is open, without pitfalls. I have spoken."

As if dismissing the others from his mind, he dug a short clay pipe from the pouch at his girdle, and fished in the fire for a glowing ember.

FOR a long time Ghirei Khan considered matters, and it became apparent to him that he was master of the situation. Riders had come in from scouring the steppe and reported that the three Cossacks had travelled without companions to his *kibitka*. He knew that Vladimir and the foot soldiers could never catch his Tatars, and the Cossacks were unarmed—hostages. The prisoners were in his hands, and he could make his own terms with the Muscovites.

He thought of slaying the three warriors before going back to Sirog. When in doubt Ghirei Khan always took up the sword, and for this reason he was still alive on the steppe where few of his race lived to count their grandchildren on the fingers of both hands. But years had taught him caution. True, he could not understand why the three Cossacks had given themselves up, unless it was to set free the village Cossacks who were their kindred in a way. Without them he could not speak with the Muscovite prince, and if he did not strike a bargain with Vladimir, how could he claim the gold?

"The gold belongs to the Nogai!" he muttered, fingering the strands of his thin beard.

Not for the treasure of the Golden Horde, not for the standard of Tchingis Khan, his ancestor, would he have uncovered the bodies of Sirog. Now that the Muscovites had dug up the gold that had been buried with the bodies, Ghirei Khan saw no reason why he should not take it. This done, he could cover the bodies again, so that the spirits of the slain warriors would not ride upon the steppe, a thing of terror.

"God is one," he said finally. "I will go back to Sirog with the captives. Remember, O youth, the *bogatyr*, your grandsire, has sworn that the prisoners will be paid for with gold."

"He has sworn it," assented Kirdy.

"If matters fall out otherwise," said Ghirei Khan grimly, "you will bow your head to this."

And he touched the scimitar on his knees.

Kirdy laughed.

"Aforetime, O lord of lances, my grandsire was the White Khan of the Golden Horde. Alone among men he stood within the tomb of Tchingis by the shores of the Kerulon in the land of the Five Rivers. His word is not smoke."

"Then let him keep it," responded the chieftain impassively, but with something like wonder in his tiny eyes as he looked at Khlit. The old Cossack's pipe had gone out, and his head was sunk on his chest. Sleep smoothed the hard lines from his brow and lips, and Ghirei Khan thought that here was a man like himself, desiring peace rather than the path of war, and the cup by the fire more than the back of a horse.

NOT without reason was Vladimir called the Fortunate. He had been in many scrapes, but a quick wit and a ready sword had brought him out unharmed. Even his disgrace at court was little more than a shadow, and he knew it to be thus. He had slain in a duel a noble whose wife was a woman comely beyond others. When he returned to the emperor's presence he would be pardoned because his sword and the slaves of his many estates were needed in the wars.

His failings were two—pride of person and birth, and superstition. These qualities among the Muscovite *boyars* were common enough, yet in Vladimir they wrought strange fancies. He had gilded the doors of a great church in memory of the noble who had fallen to his sword, and to the woman who had caused the quarrel he sent a pilgrim's staff upon his departure into exile.

From a hint given him by merchants who dared not take the risk themselves, he had shaped his course to Sirog, and its graves had yielded a treasure.

And now, out of the steppe itself—that wilderness of grass and reeds and sandy black earth that he had cursed when he first saw it—had appeared Cossacks who could guide him back to the frontier posts.

"Yet, my lord," suggested the priest, "the young warrior may not return alive from across the river."

Vladimir thrust the last of the sturgeon-roe into his mouth and wiped his plate clean with a morsel of bread.

"Well, little old woman, the youth may not come to Sirog but the tall rogue, his companion, will do so."

The dark priest lifted his eyes inquiringly, and Vladimir rubbed the grease from his fingers on the coat of a shaggy wolf hound.

"He will come to try to steal his horse—that much I read in his face."

"You were ever fortunate, my lord. All men say it."

"Then all men lie, my father. What is fortune, save luck, good or ill? Now the wind blows fair, now foul—who can win mastery by chance?"

The *boyars* at his table shook their heads, for such words were beyond their understanding. More than one glanced over the rim of his wine cup at the chests ranged beside Vladimir's bed. The chests told a story clearly. Yonder was gold, and they would all have a share in it.

"The wind rises," said one. "Hark to it!"

"Chance?" Vladimir pursued the thread of his thought. "'Tis a foul mistress, that—a wench with a heart for any comer. Nay, I am only fortunate in this: I have seen through the tricks of my enemies and they have not seen through mine."

"Still, lord prince," remarked a noble, "you are fortunate. You have never been wounded."

"Nay," growled another who had caught the gist of his leader's remarks, "skill, not luck, brought that about. Who among living men could touch Vladimir the Red with a sword's edge?"

Now the young prince smiled, because mastery with weapons was his pride.

"Drink, my wolves," he cried. "We have found the hunting good. And you, *batko*—old gabbler—what ghost do you see, that your eyes are cast down?"

Mustering an uneasy smile, the priest drew his robe closer about him.

"My lord, the wind blows cold from the river."

In fact, savage gusts beat at the high walls of the block-house and whistled through the gaps in the towers. The canopy over the prince's bed flapped, and the fires, fed by great piles of wood, since this was their last night in Sirog, roared, while eddies of sparks shot up against the stars. A vagrant puff of air swept the table and extinguished all the candles on it.

"Saint Piotr guard us!" cried Vladimir, pushing back his chair.

The priest crossed himself thrice, for the darkening of the candles was an evil omen.

"A torch!" commanded the prince, whose mood had changed. Motioning his sword-bearer to follow him, he made his way from the blockhouse into the outer enclosure, his sable cloak whipping about his broad, stooped shoulders. At sight of him the servitors and warriors bowed to the girdle, and he flung harsh words at them, for they labored slowly at greasing the carts and mending the ox chains for the morrow's journey.

Making his rounds, Vladimir hardly glanced at the men who were his slaves; his keen gray eyes rested more often on the cattle, on the few horses, on the weapons of the pike-men, stacked by their quarters in what had been the stables of Sirog, and the firelocks of the arquebusiers who paced their beats along the palisade. Others stood at the two brass cannon, placed a few paces within the gate that now stood open.

The moon gleamed on mail and spear points, and on the ruffled waters of the distant river, save when clouds, racing across it, darkened the faces of those who stood about the young lord of Novgorod.

"Where is Durak?" he asked, when all was arranged to his satisfaction.

"So please you, my lord," spoke up Barnetski, the captain of the arquebusiers, "the sentries on the village trail thought they heard horses."

"It was the wind in the rushes," muttered another, "or else the goblins of this place are riding to the devil's mass."

"By the Saints," laughed Vladimir, "'tis my vagabond, with the maiden!"

His quick eye had picked out three figures advancing between the mounds of earth in the burial ground. A sentry challenged sharply and Durak answered, striding forward with Kirdy and Galka, the daughter of Kukubenko.

"How now, youngling," demanded the prince, "do you take service with me?"

* * *

TAKING his *kalpak* in his left hand, Kirdy bowed in greeting, and Galka, disturbed by the eager glances of the followers of the prince, bent her head and stepped back beyond the feeble light of the spluttering torch.

"Noble lord," said the young warrior gravely, "I have brought the maiden from the Tatar *aul* as I promised. By the wisdom of the *koshevoi ataman*, my grandfather, was this was done. Yet in only one way could it be done. We were too few to make an onset with swords, so we made a bargain with Ghirei Khan."

"What matter? You are here, even if you left your sword behind—and the wench is here. Tomorrow you will show us the road that leads to the Dnieper."

"Perhaps—it rests with you, my lord. Ghirei Khan has brought back all the captives, and they are waiting now under guard across the river."

"I perceive," smiled the prince, "that you have an old head on young shoulders. You are not only a warrior, but a statesman."

"The bargain was this: for your Muscovites you must give over to Ghirei Khan all that you have taken from the graves of Sirog. He has kept the cattle, but your people are unharmed."

For a moment Vladimir considered this, frowning, while Durak and the sentries watched him expectantly.

"And where," he asked, "is the big Cossack, your comrade?"

"The Tatars, my lord, are holding him fast with lariats, against our return. If we should not go back they would tie him and begin torture immediately."

"Will you go back?"

"Lord prince, if Ayub were here in my place, he would go back. No Cossack would forsake a brother in captivity. It was by order of the *koshevoi ataman* that I came in Ayub's stead."

Kirdy did not add that Khlit, who had quaffed more than one stirrup cup before setting out from the camp of the khan, had been drowsy. The old wanderer had been swaying in the saddle and talking to himself, and bade Kirdy go to the castle to consult with the prince, saying that he would follow in a moment. But Kirdy had seen him head for a goatskin of wine as soon as the river was crossed.

"Nay," responded Vladimir, "I see that you are a fool. I will pay down no ransom for two-legged cattle—or four-legged."

The young warrior started, and his hand caught at his belt where his sword had been.

"My lord, do you jest? What was your answer?"

"Ghirei Khan will have no gold from me."

Kirdy looked at the Muscovite in silence, the veins throbbing in his forehead. It had not entered his mind that the prince would not redeem the captives, and he thought with something like dismay of what would follow when he brought such an answer to Ghirei Khan. Like as not, the wild Tatar would massacre the captives out of hand, or even throw his tribesmen against the castle. There was no doubt whatever about the fate of the three Cossacks.

"The khan is not to be trifled with, *Pany*—noble lord," he said. "If you do not alter your decision the waters of the river will be red at sunrise."

With uplifted hand the prince checked his words and peered from the gate within which they were standing. Durak had seen something moving in the moonlight and challenged sharply.

"*Stoi!* What is there?"

It was Khlit, stumbling out of one of the grave pits. He had left his coat somewhere, and he smelled strongly of wet leather and mare's milk. When they saw that he was unarmed and palpably drunk, the sentries let him pass, and he bowed solemnly to Vladimir.

"*Tchelom vam, Kunak*—the forehead to you, brother. And to you, brothers, warriors. And to you, headsman, I give greetings."

Blinking at Durak's great ax, he merely shook his scalp-lock, when they asked his name.

"I tell you, I am a falcon in from the steppe. I fly high—I see far."

Sighting a cask of mead around which several pikemen stood, waiting for the prince to depart so that they could drink, he shambled over to it and, grasping the rim with both hands, thrust in his head. So long did he remain buried in the cask that the Muscovites edged over to look into it, and no man could say for sure how much he drank, although the level of the mead was much lower than before.

A slight figure darted from behind Kirdy and flung itself down before the Muscovite.

"Do not send us away, little father. We have done no harm. Did we not pay the head-tax and the hoof-tax to the noble lords? If Your Illustriousness had come to the tavern you would have seen that we harmed no one—"

"*Par dex,*" cried Vladimir, "no hurt shall come to you, Galka. As for the others—"

he shrugged and waved a muscular hand at the priest. "That is more his affair than mine."

With a girl's quick intuition Galka saw that Vladimir would yield to no pleading and that the little dark priest was afraid to say anything at all. Catching her breath, she turned to Khlit, who was supporting himself against one of the cannon. But then the torch died down to a glowing stump and the shadows rushed in on them, so that only the pallid face of the Cossack maiden and the vague gleam of armor on the warriors was to be seen.

"God have mercy on us!" she cried suddenly and, hearing a whispered command from the prince, sprang up and fled like a goat down the road before Durak and his men who had been moving toward her could seize her.

Clouds veiled the moon, and Vladimir called back his followers from pursuing the swift-footed maiden. A new torch was brought and Khlit, steadying himself with a hand on either cannon, managed to walk to Kirdy's side.

"Let the brat go—she was a wild one," the prince was saying, "but to you, *koshevoi ataman* of vagabonds, and warrior without a sword, I again offer service. No need to go to the Tatars and be hacked into bits."

Khlit sucked his mustache and passed a quivering hand across his brow, and Kirdy, seeing that he could not manage an answer, lifted his head and spoke for the veteran warrior.

"I say what the *ataman* would say in a better moment. How could Cossacks face life when that maiden has set her foot on the way to death? How could we greet a brother if we broke the law of comradeship and left Ayub to be flayed by the Tatars? We could not!"

The deep voice of the young warrior echoed strongly, because his spirit was moved. Now that Khlit would take no hand in affairs, the responsibility was his to say the right thing. He lifted a hand but did not take off his *kalpak* this time in farewell.

"Vladimir! We will save our lives as best we may, and make what bargain we can with the khan. Only remember this, Ghirei Khan will rage, and it may be that he will come up against you. So guard yourself and do not take off your armor this night."

He had spoken as if to an equal, and Vladimir gazed after the two, frowning, as they made their way down the road to escape the pits. Long after they were lost to sight he heard Khlit singing a saddle song:

"Ov vy moi—tchoboty schovi—"
My riding boots, my riding boots—
You are nice and new,
But to —— with you!"

Then Vladimir shrugged again. He had been mistaken when he thought there was pride in these men.

"*Kasaki**—vagabonds!" he exclaimed.

VI

"A fool or a money-leander may gird on a good sword, but only the hand that uses it may hold a scepter."—Arab Proverb.

AS THE hair of a jackal entering the den of a lion, or of a dog that has come suddenly upon a wolf, the hair on the head of Ghirei Khan stood up, and his small eyes became fiery sparks that smoldered when he heard the answer Vladimir had given the Cossacks.

"You spoke well at the castle gate—by —— you spoke well there!" Khlit whispered to Kirdy. "Now choose your words with care. Tell this Tatar if he would have his gold he must attack the gate. He has seen his graves uncovered and there is blood in his nostrils. If you do not choose the right words, my fledgling, you will wish you were drunk like me—"

Indeed the anger of the Nogai, squatting in the moonlight like some slant-eyed, armored idol, was enough to inspire fear.

"What did you promise?" cried Ghirei Khan, gnashing his teeth. "Where is my gold?"

"Your gold is in the castle of the Muscovite, O Khan," responded Kirdy calmly.

"Dog of an unbeliever! I will put the torch to the castle. I will spread a carpet of the slain."

"Aye, Ghirei Khan. But without us you will not have your gold."

The Tatar grunted and beat his knees with his fists. "You can not bring me the gold. You said it."

"When we asked the Muscovites for it we had no swords in our hands. Give us our swords and we will take it."

"Allah! Am I a blind man to fall twice in the same pit?"

**Kasaki*—Cossacks. The real meaning of the word is "vagabonds" or "masterless men."

Nevertheless, he began to ponder. Even in his rage the Nogai chieftain was far from being a fool. In the past he had raided more than one walled town, and while the Cossacks had been within the gate he had visited the outskirts of the cemetery, and the blood was hot in his forehead. He had seen the desecrated graves, and the battle lust was beginning to take hold of him. No longer did he think of returning peacefully to his *yurt* fire. A few guttural commands brought his leading warriors about him, and when he had spoken with them he turned to Kirdy who still stood before him with folded arms.

It occurred to the savage Tatar that the young warrior might have saved his skin if he had stayed in the castle instead of coming back. Ghirei Khan could appreciate daring, as well as loyalty to a comrade.

"My falcons have been flying about the castle. I have no more than seven tens, and they say that the Muscovites have more than a hundred—many with firelocks. I myself saw two cannon. The wooden wall of the castle is stout; our arrows can not pierce it nor our ponies leap over. You say that you can lead my men to the gold. Has your grandfather, the *bogatyr*, a plan? What is it?"

Kirdy glanced at Khlit anxiously, but instead of helping him with a word, the old Cossack was still chanting hoarsely the saddle song, his legs spread wide before him.

"Aforetime," he said boldly, "the *bogatyr* took by stratagem Alamut, the Eagle's Nest of Islam, and a walled city of Cathay. To him, a wooden castle in the steppe is a small matter, and he bade me attend to it."

"Allah!"

The khan, no little astonished, scrutinized Khlit keenly and what he saw seemed to enlighten him. He did not know how to smile but his black eyes snapped.

"And what is your plan, puppy?"

Kirdy himself did not know this, but to hesitate would have been disastrous.

"You also made a promise, O Khan, that the captives should be spared and permitted to go with us in safety from Sirog."

"My word is not smoke."

A powerful voice from the darkness near at hand interrupted them.

"And a horse, Kirdy. Do not forget my Kabarda—black with a white star on the forehead."

"And Ayub is to take out his Kabarda stallion."

"So be it. And what will you do, O my colt?"

Kirdy considered and made his choice—

"We will draw our swords against the Muscovites."

The aid of three such men was worth twenty Tatars, and Ghirei Khan nodded grimly. He understood well enough that the Cossacks' only chance of life was to prevail against the Muscovites and this was well.

"What is your plan?" he demanded.

Having gained a moment for reflection, Kirdy answered without hesitation:

"Divide your forces, half on the steppe side, half by the river gate. Light a fire here—send men to gather dry reeds, and tie bunches to your arrows. Set the reeds afire and shoot your shafts into the blockhouse."

"*Shim!*" cried Ghirei Khan, rising. "Go! Send an arrow through the gate so the dogs will know their fate."

While a warrior mounted and sped up the roadway, wheeling his horse on its haunches after he had loosed an arrow that quivered in the wall of the blockhouse, the Nogais began to flit about in the darkness. Soon the howl of a wolf was heard from the far side of the castle, but the wolf was a Tatar calling to his companions. Ghirei Khan's slant eyes glowed in the murk of moonlight like a cat's and from every quarter came the soft thudding of hoofs, the creaking of saddles. Only a man who knew the warfare of the steppe as Kirdy did could have told what was going on.

The preparations roused Khlit. He rose to his feet, stretching and sniffing the air, and when Ayub came up bearing the two swords of the Cossacks, the *ataman* grasped Kirdy roughly by the shoulder.

"Hi, what kind of a plan is this? If these Nogais dismount to climb the wall they'll be beaten off like flies. Don't go on foot, only dogs do that! Stay in your saddles. Let a dozen Nogais fire the burning arrows from the far side and raise a tumult—and gallop up the road with the rest. The gate is open."

Kirdy shook his head.

"I thought of that, but Vladimir has placed his cannon to bear on the gate. They would wipe us out. You've been licking the cup, *bogatyr*."

Planting his legs wide, though a little

unsteadily, Khlit surveyed his grandson from under shaggy brows.

"*Tchoupek-shaitan!* Dog of the devil! What if I had a glass or two? My head's sound. I'll ride up alone if you hang back."

"Well said!" laughed the reckless Ayub, swinging his great blade around his head. "Only Ghirei Khan doesn't love those cannon. He'll make us three lead."

The pulse began to beat in Kirdy's forehead and his thin lips tightened. His had been the responsibility and he had tried to quit himself of it—to save Galka and the captives while Khlit was drinking and Ayub exchanging taunts with his Nogai guards. But now his quick temper flamed up and he cast all cautions aside.

"Aye," he cried, "we'll ride at the gate. Alive or dead, I'll be through it before you twain."

Khlit's eyes gleamed and he turned away to seek his horse, while Ayub, whose spirits had risen at the prospect of action, leaned on the crosspiece of his broadsword and boasted.

"Eh, *ouchâr*—eh, young warrior! No one will take away your bib or spill your milk. But as for me, I've had cannon go off under my nose too often, to cry about it."

Kirdy had gone off to find his horse and tell Ghirei Khan what they meant to do, and Ayub finished his recital to himself.

"Well, it's not exactly all sugar and cream, charging two guns loaded with grape. The balls will go through us as a sickle through grass, but God knows it's better so than lying stretched out for these last hours with a Nogai lariat fast on every wrist and ankle and the ends of the lariats tied to the saddle peaks of their ponies."

The Cossacks were too experienced to try to escape in the darkness now that they had their weapons. The Nogais would have run them down within a mile.

IT WAS noticed in the castle that after the first arrow struck in the wall the howling of wolves was heard on every quarter. The Muscovites climbed the towers but could see nothing in the elusive moonlight. When the first flaming arrows quivered in the palisade on the steppe side, Vladimir's captains roused the sleepers and formed their men in the enclosure, and the prince himself who had been through more than one siege gave command to extinguish all fires.

"Gentlemen," he said to his *boyars*, "the glow-worms of the steppe are showing themselves. We must put our heels on them."

The arquebusiers, slow-match in hand, were told off, half to the menaced quarter and half to take station behind the cannon. They were phlegmatic Moldavians, veterans of the emperor's wars. Under Durak the thirty pikemen were placed in reserve at the door of the blockhouse itself, while the sixty-odd retainers of the *boyars*, armed with sword and spear, were sent to the defense of the palisade.

Watchmen were dispatched to the towers, and reported that the burning arrows were doing little damage. Sometimes the blazing reeds fell off in mid-air, and when a shaft, fanned by the gusts of wind, began to kindle flames in the heavy logs a sack of water or a wet cloak put them out.

More deadly were the unseen arrows of the tribesmen, which hissed through the air whenever a head was shown on the steppe side. Here, too, resounded the shouts of the Tatars and the trampling of horses through brush.

Vladimir listened, his head out-thrust as if he were looking into the darkness beyond the walls.

"They make too much ado yonder. The attack will come here, through the gate. Barnetski, are the cannon primed? Then set your firelocks in the rests, and Durak, you send a dozen stout fellows to each side the gate. Keep them out of sight."

The captain of the Moldavians, Barnetski, bent over to look at the priming of the two pieces, where black grains had been spilled over the touch-holes. The holes were properly covered, and so he made announcement to Vladimir, swinging the slow-match gently to keep the glowing spark at the end of it bright. Like his master, Barnetski believed in leaving nothing to chance.

Glancing back from where he stood between the two cannon, the veteran captain observed that the arquebusiers had laid their heavy firelocks in the pronged rests.

At either side the door Durak's men waited, some with their hands on the wings of the gate that Vladimir had left open on purpose.

Shining dully in the moonlight, clad in bronzed armor even to shoulder pieces, brassarts and crested morion, Barnetski looked like some black Vulcan tending a tiny spark of light. But it was Vladimir who first heard the thudding of hoofs down by the river.

"They come, Barnetski! Wait for my word to touch off the cannon."

His level voice, amused and eager, as if he were about to watch some new antics of mountebanks or dwarfs grimacing to pleasure him, carried to the pikemen by the gate.

"When the artillery has blasted them, close the gate, my fine fellows. If some few ride through alive so much the better. My iron wolves will pull them down."

Sure of what would happen, having left no slightest alternative to the whim of that fickle lady, Fortune, Vladimir narrowed his eyes to stare down the strip of moonlight. By holding his fire he made certain of havoc, knowing that the tribesmen would never ride to a second attack, once the gate was shut. So he watched a dark blur of horses race up the roadway until he could see flying manes and the flicker of lance points. When he made out the white *svitka* of Kirdy, the black bulk of Ayub and the gray head of Khlit within stone's throw of the entrance, he laughed. The Cossacks were standing in their stirrups, whipping on their ponies, racing with death.

"Touch off both cannon, Barnetski. May the Lord have mercy on their souls!"

The captain lowered the point of flame in his hand to one breech, shifted it to the other and pressed it down in the priming. Then, shouting out an oath, he dropped on one knee, calling over his shoulder—

"Fire with the arquebuses!"

Both cannon had failed to go off.

Behind Barnetski the firelocks roared, covering everything with white, swirling smoke. But an instant before the volley every rider dropped in the saddle. Some, gripping the long manes of the ponies, swung down, crouched upon one stirrup. Some leaped to the ground and sprang into saddle again when smoke rolled over them. Others bent close to the necks of the racing horses.

Kirdy's horse was shot from under him, and he cleared the stirrups in time to run out of the way of the pack behind him, plunging among the arquebusiers who were drawing their rapiers. Ayub's leg was pierced by a ball and he lost his seat in the saddle, rolling to one side and limping to his feet.

"Down pikes!" roared Vladimir. "To me, Durak, you dog!"

Shaggy ponies were catapulting through the portal—only a pair of horses and riders had gone down at the hasty volley from the firelocks—and the prince saw at once that the gates could not now be closed. The entrance was jammed with Tatars barking their war-cry: *ghar—ghar—ghar!*

Meanwhile the armored *boyars* and their henchmen were running up from all sides.

KHLIT had slid from the saddle and had run beside his horse until he was past the cannon. Regaining his seat with a leap he reined off to one side and peered through the smoke. The moon was bright in a clear sky, and one of the wind-whipped towers was breaking into flames. The figures that darted and stumbled through the haze were easily to be seen.

The first Tatars, urged on by Ghirei Khan, had not checked their ponies, but were circling the enclosure around the blockhouse at full speed, brandishing their round shields and thrusting with their lances. So they made room for others to come after, and now seventy or more were wheeling and plunging in the enclosure.

Ranged in clusters, the *boyars* were hacking with their long, straight swords, trying to unite with other groups. The arquebusiers of Barnetski had been separated, knocked asunder by the rush of horses, and the Moldavian captain was down with a broken lance point under his chin. Ayub was nowhere to be seen and Khlit looked anxiously for Kirdy.

He saw the white *svitka* at once, on the far side of the scattered Moldavians. Kirdy had heard Vladimir's shout and made toward him as a hawk stoops. He had lost his hat, and ran bent low, his bare right arm swinging by his left hip—at the end of it a glittering arc of blue steel.

"Cut down the horses!" Vladimir's clear shout rose above the shouting and the clashing of blades. "We are the stronger."

A Muscovite with a pike stepped in front of Kirdy and the young warrior thrust up the man's weapon, drawing the edge of the curved sword under his ribs. The Muscovite lifted the pike as if for another blow, when his knees gave way and he fell on his back.

"Guard yourself, lord prince," Kirdy cried.

Although Vladimir turned eagerly, he was not permitted to cross swords with the young warrior. Durak had brought up the dozen remaining arquebusiers. Neither time nor space served for them to set up their clumsy matchlocks on the rests and their bullets went wild for the most part. Plucking out their rapiers, they advanced in a body toward the prince, coming between him and Kirdy who raged at them, his sword striking sparks from the massive armor that had been cast to turn bullets. And Durak's great ax swept up and down, slaying a dismounted Nogai and splitting open the chest of a rearing pony.

This did not escape the keen eye of Ghirei Khan who had been circling around the heart of the struggle.

"Take your lariats!" the chieftain called to his men. "Pull the iron warriors apart."

His words ended in a grunt, and the *zvuk* of a bullet striking into flesh. He barely swayed in the saddle, but one gnarled hand gripped the horn and he rested his scimitar across his knee. The Nogais swept before him, swinging their long ropes with running nooses at the end.

Then began a strange struggle, the Moldavians thrusting at the elusive tribesmen and the Nogais wheeling away from them. But the heavy iron plates, the gussets at the shoulders and the hip pieces slowed up the movements of the armored men, and first one, then another, was caught by a noose about the neck and jerked from the rank. As the Nogais whipped up their ponies, the arquebusiers were pulled from their feet and dragged, clattering about the wide enclosure until they strangled. Durak and those who escaped the flying nooses ran back to the blockhouse entrance, where the *boyars* had formed at last.

"Will you end your life on a rope, Vladimir?" laughed Kirdy.

"You will not see it!" cried the prince, springing forward. His scimitar grated against the curved saber and such was the power of his long arm that Kirdy gave ground at once.

The Tatars had suffered as severely as the Muscovites, pent in by the palisade, and there fell at this moment a quiet in the merciless conflict. The Muscovites who still kept their feet were backed against the blockhouse, the tribesmen circling about Ghirei Khan, swaying in his saddle.

Over their heads the flames were devouring the tower and burning brands fell thick among the warriors.

Khlit, sitting his horse apart from them, shaded his eyes against the glare of the fire and watched the sword duel, his muscular hands clasping and unclasping.

The two blades, now flashing silver in the moonlight, now gleaming red from reflected flames, coiled together—down and up. They parted and engaged again, and parted when Vladimir slashed wide and left himself open to a cut.

Kirdy darted in and his curved blade grated against the mail under the Muscovite's kaftan. Vladimir, who had foreseen this, hacked down, his arm only moving from the elbow—a swift cut, impossible to parry.

Nor had Kirdy the fraction of a second to leap back. Instead he dropped to his knees, the prince's scimitar flashing in front of his eyes. Then, when Vladimir recovered and thrust swiftly, the young warrior leaped up as a wolf springs back. The two blades struck and sparks flew.

The flames crackled above them, lighting up the pallid, smiling face of the noble, the wild countenance of the boy. Their boots thudding through the smoking ashes of a fire, they changed ground, and Vladimir mustered his strength to attack for the last time, being certain now that his skill was greater than the warrior's.

Kirdy gave ground, but he threw aside all caution as well. Sweat dripped into his eyes and instead of parrying, he slashed with all the strength of his arm in each cut. A groaning shout came from his tense throat—

"Ou-haa—ou-haa!"

Vladimir now sought to engage the blades and lock hilts; his breath whistled from his lungs, and his teeth gleamed between his lips. The whirlwind of steel was about his head and he stepped back to gain a second's respite. Again—and he tossed up his scimitar.

The boy's heavy blade whistled in the air and struck full against his side. The keen edge snapped the links of the iron mail and the watchers saw Vladimir drop to one knee when Kirdy jerked his sword free. A rush of blood stained the girdle of the prince, and Vladimir raised his head slowly.

"Better," he gasped, "than rope—or flames."

The curved saber had penetrated far under his heart and the color was already draining from his lips.

Dazed with weariness the young warrior

stood before him, scarcely hearing the *ghar—ghar—ghar* of the tribesmen who were beginning to shoot arrows at the Muscovites. Nor did he hear Khlit's shout—

"Well done, little *bogatyr*—by —— that was well done."

AYUB, on one good leg, had hobbled steadily toward the stables, beating down with his broadsword any Muscovite who rushed at him, but never swerving from his course. More than once he fell, and he had been cut with a pike over one ear and down one arm before he reached the carts and began to haul himself around toward the horses of the Muscovites.

For some time he sought among the oxen and the ponies of the boyars before he saw the small, black head and loose mane of the Kabarda tossing restlessly.

It was almost dark in the stable and he edged his way toward his horse, stumbling over packs and harness, heedless of what went on outside. When he laid hand on the stallion's sleek flank at last he breathed a sigh of relief. Then he bellowed with anger.

On the other side of the horse a man was quietly putting on a saddle. Reaching for the cinch, he had not seen Ayub. The light was behind him, and the astonished Zaporoghian recognized the square shoulders and steel cap of Durak.

"Turtle-egg!" he shouted, fumbling for the hilt of his broadsword which he was dragging, sheathed, in his right hand to save his injured leg. "A dog fathered you, but now you disgrace your sire by horse stealing."

Durak reared up silently, and even in his blind rage Ayub remembered the great battle-ax. The Cossack leaned back and poised his massive sword as if it had been a javelin. Grunting he heaved it at Durak's head, putting all the strength of his ox-like shoulders into the cast. He heard the round silver ball of the pommel strike something with a dull thud.

Then he flung his arms over the stallion's back, praying that the ax of the Muscovite would not drop on the horse. The Kabarda, recognizing his master, did not kick out, but jerked its head, quivering with excitement.

For a moment Ayub held his breath, listening with all his ears. He heard only the muffled tumult outside, and judged that Durak lay where he had fallen, whether dead or not he did not know.

Reaching under the horse he felt around in the straw until he grasped his scabbard with the sword in it. The silver ball on the hilt felt damp. Ayub strapped it on his back and satisfied himself that the snorting stallion had the bridle on, and the bit between his teeth.

"You little devilkin," he muttered when the bony muzzle smote his cheek. "Ghirei Khan won't change his mind about you now. I saw him swallow a bullet the wrong way. As for that turtle-egg, it wasn't a knightly blow I struck him, but the son of a dog laid me down with a log. Now we must go and have a look at the battle. I didn't see Khlit or that bit of forked lightning, Kirdy—"

Mounting from the wrong side, to the utter astonishment of the stallion, he pushed his wounded leg into the stirrup with a grimace and wheeled out of the stable.

His first glance was at the tower, up which the flames were roaring, and he shook his head when he beheld the bodies heaped about the gate. No Muscovites were visible, but the Tatars were trotting about the blockhouse, bows in hand, sending arrows into every aperture. Only a few pistols answered them. The *boyars* had taken refuge in the blockhouse and the tribesmen held the palisade and the outer ground.

"If they don't sally out, they'll be smoked like hams in the penthouse," Ayub thought, "and if they do, they'll be cut open like fish in a boat. *Hi*, the *ataman* has a sober head at last."

Khlit had reined his pony in front of the closed gate of the blockhouse, holding up his hand without a weapon in it.

"Ho, within there!" His deep shout was heard above the roar of the flames in the towers. "Lay down your arms and come out. Your game is played."

There was silence for a time, while no pistols barked, and the tribesmen held their arrows on the string.

"Who speaks?" demanded a voice from the log castle.

"A *koshevoi ataman* of the Cossacks."

Other voices began to argue. The Muscovites had lost their leader; Barnetski and Durak were gone. Flight was impossible, and they could not hold the flames in check for long.

"What terms?" asked the first voice, not so arrogantly.

"Fair ransom for the *boyars*—slavery for their slaves," responded Khlit briefly.

"At your hands?"

"Nay, the Tatars."

"But you are taking the villagers safe across the frontier."

"No fault of yours. Open the door or that gold will be lost, and the Tatars will give you only their sword edges."

Almost at once the door was pulled back and some forty men including a half-dozen nobles walked out, weaponless, many of them trying to bind up their wounds. When the last was out, the Nogais ran into the castle, seeking the bed of the prince and the chests that stood beside it.

Ayub trotted over to where Kirdy was kneeling by the dying lord of the Muscovites. Vladimir, propped up on one elbow, was trying to speak to the little priest who was shivering, his cope wrapped close about him.

"*Batko*," the hoarse voice of the prince forced out the words by an effort of will, "do not forget—the fifty-three souls to be prayed for. My estates—money will be given—and for the others, slain back there. For the *boyars* whose wife—ah, *batko* pray that God's mercy be not denied me. I sinned in leading my men here—stood by when the Tatars came the first time. They came back—the scourge of God."

In spite of himself, looking into the haggard gray eyes, Ayub was moved.

"Faith, 'tis a sad thing to have a black spirit like that. Fall to your work, priest! Nay, Kirdy, don't sigh—you'll get used to things like this. Give him a sip of brandy and make the sign of the cross over him. If he lived like a devil, at least he turned up his toes like a man."

And the boy, rising from his knees, took the curved saber still stained with blood and swept it down and across the dying Muscovite.

BY NOW the Tatars who had been guarding the captive villagers had hurried up, eager to take part in the pillaging, bringing with them Kukubenko and his people. The tavern keeper, standing outside the gate with pale Galka beside him, stared dully at the flames devouring the castle. The events of the last hours were past his understanding, but his daughter was more quick-witted. She watched the Tatars herding the Muscovites down toward the river, and stripping the bodies of armor and weapons. When she saw Ghirei Khan carried by, in a horse litter escorted by a dozen tribesmen, she knew that the Tatars were leaving and that the villagers had been exchanged for the Muscovites.

She tripped up to Ayub, caught his hand and pressed her fresh lips against it.

"Zaporoghian, our hearts thank you. May the Father and Son bless you for this night's work!"

"Well, it was a small affair," responded Ayub, pleased. "You could hardly call it a battle, lass. Still, it was warm for us, for a moment."

He glanced at the spear points of the retreating Tatars, and was silent until they reached the river.

"I thought the Nogais would rub us out after everything was over. Then you'd have been no better off than before. But Ghirei Khan had a bullet in his throat—can't speak for a while—and Khlit, the *ataman* yonder, had got over his drinking bout. He ordered them around in their own language, and when they looked at him they thought his eye was like a basilisk. So they kept their word and went off like lambs."

Only half understanding this, Galka smiled. She was scarcely a woman grown but she knew that she could persuade big Ayub to do what she wanted.

"And now, Zaporoghian, out of your kindness you will take us back to the border where we can find Christians?"

"Aye, why not? This is no place for the likes of you. But first you'll have to bury your former masters. Can't leave them lying around like this."

"The men will see to it, noble knight. I'll tell Kukubenko at once, and he will get the priest. Indeed, you think of everything and I am sure that you are the finest *bogatyr* of all the Zaporoghians."

Ayub stroked up his mustaches and glanced down at the slip of a girl feelingly, but he saw that she was watching Kirdy who sat on a log, his head in his hands, the curved sword still across his knees.

"Nay," he said honestly, "there's the *bogatyr*. At least he'll be one if he keeps on like this. He won't look at you now, lass, because the fever of sword-strokes is still in his veins and his knightly spirit is intent on Cossack glory. Tomorrow he'll strike up with the *bandura* and have you dance."

He stroked her head while the gray eyes looked up at him inscrutably, glowing with the thoughts that come to the young, and the veteran warrior could not read the message in them. Besides, his throat was dry and he had been hunting high and low for *gorilka* to drink.

Abandoning Galka, he continued his search until he halted by the two cannon in the entrance of the palisade. Sniffing strongly he peered to right and left and finally bent over the breech of one of the brass guns.

Thrusting an exploring finger into the tiny heap of powder over the touch-hole, he held it up to the light, then put it to his tongue. Without doubt the priming smelled strongly of corn brandy, and he wondered why. Picking up a blazing stick that had blown from one of the towers he laid it on the breech of the other cannon, to the consternation of the villagers who were in the gate.

"It's quite true," he muttered, "that the priming has been dampened and the guns won't go off."

Waxing curious, he called Kirdy over and explained what he had discovered. The young warrior considered a moment with bent head, and uttered an exclamation.

"When we came to the gate to arrange the ransom with Vladimir, Khlit drank deep from the *gorilka* cask. When all eyes were on the maiden Galka and the torch burned low I saw my grandfather stoop over each cannon. It is in my mind that he was not drunk at that time."

Ayub would have spoken, but then he sighted Khlit approaching. The old *ataman* swaggered in his walk, the silver heels of his boots striking the earth powerfully.

"Hey, Zaporoghian," he cried, "I am too feeble to ride with the brotherhood again. I will not gird on the sword. But I have brought you an *ouchâr*—a fledgling grandson who will lead men and whose name will yet be a terror among the Tatars and the Turks. This night he faced Ghirei Khan boldly and cut down the Muscovite prince. Without aid from us he made a good plan."

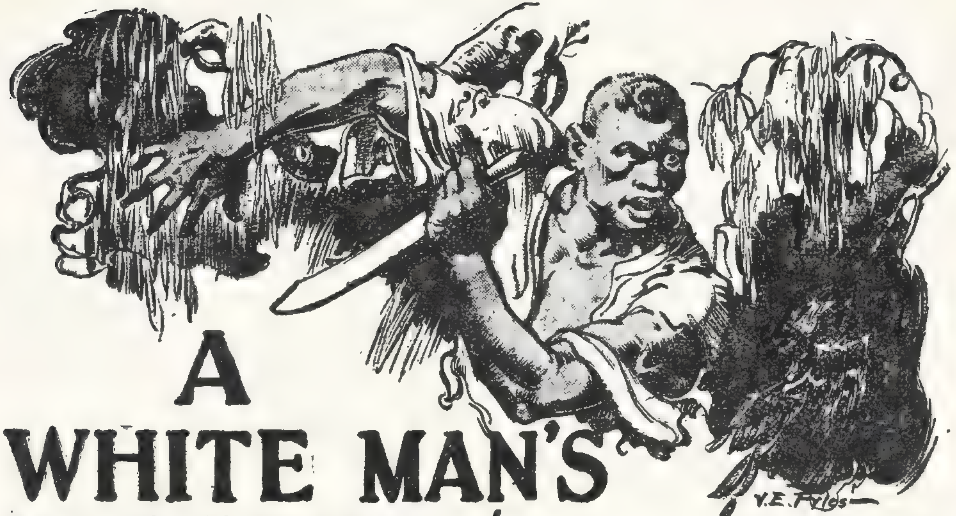
"The sir brothers will bid him welcome," assented Ayub earnestly. "But when you say he did it without aid you lie, old dog. Was it not you who spat on the breeches of the Muscovite guns? The angels themselves must have put a turnip on Barnetski's face instead of a nose, that he did not smell the corn brandy when he examined the priming."

Khlit looked at him gravely from under shaggy brows.

"Not corn brandy," he growled. "In my day we had corn brandy. If you poured it on the breech of a cannon and put a match to it the powder would go off like mad. More than one cannon did we burst that way."

Ayub put both hands on his massive sides, and bowed to the girdle.

"Prince of liars and father of battles, I bid you welcome. Nay, you are Khlit."



A WHITE MAN'S NIGGER

by David Thibault

Author of "The Thick Plottens," "The Long-Headed Sapsucker," etc.

IT WAS late July—interregnum between laying by crops and cotton-picking time. Bain had wandered a hundred and twenty-five miles westward from his cotton empire by the Mississippi River, on one of his infrequent visits to a married sister in Little Rock.

"Daisy," he said after breakfast on the second morning of his stay, "I thought Uncle Jack was still here with you."

"Oh, didn't I tell you? He got so feeble last winter that Tom wouldn't let him work any more. It nearly broke his heart, but we promised to let him come back when he was better. He's living in the servants' quarters back of Swanson's home, out on High Street."

"You-all looking after him—money, I mean?"

"Of course. Tom pays for the groceries—what little Uncle Jack eats—but Mr. Swanson won't take any rent. Tom says Uncle Jack saved every penny we've given him for the past fifteen years, and keeps his money in the house somewhere."

An hour later Bain parked his yellow roadster on High Street. A dense crowd blocked the alley which ran back of the Swanson home.

"It's Sam Bain! Why hello, old Dead Eye!"

A palm cracked on his shoulder like a pistol shot. He turned without starting and grasped the hand of Bob "Millionaire" Schollard, broker, good fellow, and devotee of rod and gun. He was one of the few men who had penetrated the plantation manager's reserve to his friendship. Neither made any attempt to understand the other, and two more widely differing types could not be inhabitants of the same planet.

"Well, Bob, still betting on flea-fights and the market?"

But the other's long, clean-shaven face had sobered.

"Sam, this—" he nodded toward the crowd ahead— "is bad. When did you hear about it?"

"What?"

"Why, it's in the *Gazette*—didn't you know your old nigger had been killed?"

"No."

The manager's inscrutable smoked-agate eyes met his friend's; they revealed nothing.

"I thought that's what brought you. They think it was done about ten-thirty last night by another negro. Uncle Jack was shot twice, and died right away. Robbery, they think."

They shoved through the crowd. Schollard was known to the officer in charge, and when Bain's interest in the old negro was made known, the two were permitted to enter the dingy little house.

There was the usual oval group—the

downward gazing faces, lifted now and then as unconsciously subdued talk glided back and forth across the prostrate figure which seemed too flat and small and still ever to have been a living man. The scene was not new to the plantation manager. It bore somewhat on the nerves of his companion.

"They surely got your old man, Sam; that's Uncle Jack, all right."

"Yeah."

No one had ever accused Bain of loquacity.

"Bad business. Been with your family a long time, hadn't he? Ever since the war?"

"Longer."

Some one in authority was clearing the room. Schollard and Bain remained, in conversation with the sergeant of detectives.

"Why," exclaimed Bob Schollard pityingly, "the poor old fellow's little old glass lamp's still burning!"

It stood on an up-ended cracker box and resembled a large turnip standing on its tail on an inverted saucer. Above it a single ten-penny nail securely held a heat-crumpled, soot-stained photograph to the boarding of the wall.

"They're kids—white kids, pretending to pick cotton. Some of his old-time white folks, you reckon?"

Bain looked at the picture and, deliberately plucking it down, crammed it into his coat pocket.

"I'll keep this," said he quietly.

"Those old-school darkies were the kind, but they're dying out," mused Schollard, who knew nothing whatever about it and cared less, but who had the devil's own knack of saying appropriate things. "Pity is, nothing will be done about it. The negro who did this will pull for Kansas, or Chicago, or some such place where our black criminals are hailed as victims of oppression. If they did give him up, they'd fight extradition until the abused murderer died of old age. But most likely nothing will be done."

Bain looked at the comparatively clean spot on the wall where the photograph had hung; at the squalid, sheetless bed, its quilts thrown back, its shuck pillow deeply indented. On a home-made table lay soiled dishes, fork, knife and spoon. Ready to hand stood a baking-powder can half full of coarse salt, and a characteristically long and corrugated bottle held a mixture of red-pepper pods and vinegar. These humble and homely details were as familiar and as memory-provoking as the old, dead face.

"Bob," said the manager, "they'll get this one—inside a week."

"Go you even money they won't! Put up or shut up, old Leather Skin."

"It's a bet."

Bain spoke always the same way—without humor and without heat. Now he looked at his watch and started toward the door.

"Well say! What are we betting? Air?"

"Up to fifteen hundred dollars."

"Go you, you dried mackerel! Who holds it?"

Schollard was tickled all over. He had an abundance of ready money; it took more than the day's work to afford him the thrills that most of us get by battling the wolf from the door.

"You hold it, if you want to. Give you a check tonight."

"Trust me, hey?"

"Far as I can pitch a box-car. I'd have no trouble getting anything back from you," explained Bain without smiling.

"Braggo!" the other feinted joyously at the manager's face, not, however, causing him to bat an eye. "We'll just record it, then?"

"Yeah."

Later in the day a brown-faced man, lank but wiry, sauntered into the office of the chief of police. That official attempted to size him up, but gave up almost immediately.

"Chief Bradberry?"

"That's who."

"I'd like to talk to you and the captain of detectives at the same time. How about it?"

A buzzer buzzed.

"What's your name?"

"Bain. I run Big Bend Plantation over in Phillips county."

"Oh, yes. The name's familiar."

* * *

A DOOR opened. A small, bald man with no eyebrows and a closely trimmed blond mustache took one of the leather-cushioned chairs, and looked at the chief. He said nothing and kept on looking.

"Don't know," grinned the chief, as to a spoken question. "Mr. Bain here wants to tell us something."

The indecently white, browless gaze was

swung to Bain, and was met by the unbeatable inscrutability of smoked-agate eyes.

"An old nigger of mine was murdered last night—I guess you know. What chance of catching the man soon?"

"Not much." The squeaky, effeminate voice of the captain of detectives filled in and framed the outline labeled "Freak" which his appearance sketched. But he wasn't one.

"Why not?"

"No rewards, no public interest. It's immoral as ——, but it's true, Mr. Bain, that most of our men would rather catch a man plus, than just a man—everything else being equal, of course."

"That's sense," insisted the plantation man. "What's considered a good reward? Big enough to get action?"

"Oh, a hundred dollars—fifty's better than breaking a leg. But in a city of less than a hundred thousand like this, there's not much hiding. What you need to do is to look up the sheriff's office and start state-wide stuff—if you can afford it."

"Still, I'd like a close watch kept on town—places like Harrington's Addition, and West Ninth. How about a thousand dollars?"

"Great Scott's emulsion of cod liver oil! Is this old nigger of yours the one that wrote 'Uncle Tom's Cabin?' Don't make it 'dead or alive,' or they'll be bumpin' 'em off by the dozen, and skinning their faces. A thousand dollars! That's twice five hundred dollars—four times two hundred and fifty—ten times a hundred—"

"Well, do what you can."

Bain called at the offices of the three principal newspapers and through their ad columns offered not only the reward for capture which had demented the browless detective, but also lesser amounts for information and clues. He visited the county court - house next, and deputy sheriffs whistled between their teeth and looked far off over the plumy elms that border Scott Street, as they planned spending the unwise dollars of this erratic man who set such store by the dead of another race.

"Whew!" exclaimed Deputy Sheriff Babbs to Deputy Sheriff Marvin, "four figures for a common case like this! Coffman has already tipped me off who done it, and if he's right I know right where to go."

Schollard heard of these activities, and meeting Bain the next day, twitted him unmercifully.

"A week's a week, you know—seven days, no more, no less." He carried it off with the tantalizing swagger of a preordained victor, doing his best to accomplish the impossible—get a rise out of Sam Bain. "You're out fifteen hundred dollars already, Old Dead Eye. By the time they get through not catching him, you'll be to the place where it won't do you any good if they do catch him. A week from yesterday, remember."

"I'll remember."

In Bain's sweeping campaign to bring the murderer to justice Schollard saw no deeper or more complex motive than that underlying any other major sporting event. To Bob Schollard a bet was a bet—the most highly pleasurable of human diversions, to be won by any fair means, but above all a sacred institution in the matter of settlement.

Early on the morning of the fourth day after the murder, Willis Babbs called Bain by phone at his sister's house, and after a hasty conversation, presented himself in person.

"Have that check ready, Mr. Bain. It's him or me before noon today, sure this time."

"Located?" A look nearly approaching animation stirred Bain's tan features. "Where?"

"Nope. I won't spill it, even to you. You want him caught, and you might send reinforcements. I want all of that thousand."

"I hope you get it, Willis. Say—"

"You say it." The other grinned amiably, expectantly.

"I'm going with you."

"You're on! Fact is, I came in to ask you. You see, you are the only man alive that would help me an' not want to hog half that reward. Which car do we take?"

"Mine. Yours ain't exactly a car."

"The —— it ain't!"

They hummed up hill at the foot of Barber Avenue, turned left around the cemetery fence, crossed Fourche south of the Biddle Shops and settled down to real going on the Sweet Home Pike. Nothing passed them, not even the notorious Pine Bluff cars that speed home from Benton sloshing full of "white mule," and wrack their chomping springs in the accursed pot holes of the Dollarway.

Two hundred yards per word, Deputy Babbs explained his plan of campaign:

“Our man, Norman Hackett, spent last night with a friend close to Rotican. He’s there yet, and he’s got a Ford car he stole at Pine Bluff. If he hadn’t stole that car, we’d never have located him this side of sole leather.”

“Where’s he been?”

“Pine Bluff.”

The yellow roadster boomed and hummed. Sweet Home was far behind. Higgin’s Switch and Wrightsville were but flashes of frantically striving poultry, and clatters of thrown echoes. Rotican, a spur for loading logs, was next.

“I think he’ll break cover, and I’ll introduce you,” grinned Babbs. “Look for a brown nigger ’bout nine foot high by four wide. New jumper suit—stole it at Redfield—and black Stetson hat—also stole that, and it’s new. He’ll be heeled, too. Automatic shotgun—number eight buck.”

“——!”

“——’s right! We got to look sharp. ’Jever shoot a man?”

Bain did not reply.

“Well listen: If you don’t think you can, don’t go into this thing. This coon is a honey. You saw what he did to old Jack—one in the lungs, one in the neck.”

“I’ll manage. Yonder’s a car in front of that cabin.”

“Yes! Keep going, keep going! Ain’t that a man coming out? Gas, man. Step on it!”

A CONTINUOUS throaty roar came from under the hood of the yellow car. Ahead, the Ford swung into the pike. A huge black head hung out of the left-hand side for an instant, was withdrawn simultaneously with a great acceleration of the speed of the smaller car, and the great chase was on.

“Knows we’re after him!” shrieked Babbs.

Excitement kicked his voice up by octaves, but the freckled hands which crammed cartridges into the magazine of the high-power rifle were brisk and firm. His face was not, for the moment, commonplace; upon it sat the joy of joys.

Suddenly their quarry swerved out of sight. Hard pressed, the negro put his machine at a fence gap, and streaked it, bouncing like a cotton patch rabbit, across the old furrows of an abandoned field. Without hesitation Bain followed. The car in front staggered and lifted as the going got soft, and they saw the gigantic blue-clad driver glance anxiously backward, and then toward the cypresses of Clear Lake.

“He’s going to run!” yelled Bain.

His own car floundered deeply, its greater weight giving the fugitive all the advantage. But the pressure was too great for Hackett. The hood of the yellow car, with the two eager faces, and the blue rifle barrel above, must have seemed to snort and thunder at the back of his very neck. He sprang out and raced across the field.

In his incautious eagerness, Babbs jumped before the big roadster slowed. He was snapped, stunned and senseless, to the ground. Bain jammed his brake, shot foot first over the door, dived for the trembling flivver ahead, which was chattering away in neutral, and gave chase in the lighter car.

Two hundred yards away Hackett dived into the dwarfy button-willows of the lake’s edge. Bain was on the spot before the branches quieted. He sprang from the car and plunged among the underbrush. Unmistakably fresh tracks led along the lake’s edge—tracks into which muddy water still oozed and eddied. Onward, cat-like he glided. Left—around a huge rotten log—right through a suspicious, dense, tangle of purple-flowered iron-weed. He wheeled about the expanded base of an enormous cathedral-like cypress tree, and stood face to face with Hackett!

Then Bain realized that he had no weapon. In the heat of the chase all thought had been burned out by the determination to overtake. Those who knew Bain could have judged of the height of his excitement by this uncharacteristic incaution.

The men were fifteen feet apart. Seeing no gun in his pursuer’s hand, the murderer whipped out an eight-inch butcher’s knife and slowly advanced. Bain’s desperate glance, never wholly removed from the giant, lighted upon the only accessible weapon. It was as crude as his extremity was great. To allow axle clearance for log wagons, many of the taller cypress knees had been cut, and thrown out of the right of way. The manager took a quick backward step, reached downward and again faced his man. In his hands he held a solid two-foot-long cypress knee, the cone of green wood grasped purposefully by the apex.

"Drop that knife and come on."

Hackett was silent, watchful. Plainly he had no more intention of surrendering than the lean, brown-faced man who faced him had of returning without his prisoner. They eyed each other tensely in the gloom of the lakeside cypresses.

Quick, as a snake is quick, and with the same elemental singleness of purpose which uncoils the striking rattler, the huge black hurled himself upon Bain. Faster than thinking, the manager's muscles flexed, and the clubbed cypress knee crashed down on the negro's shoulder.

Momentum of the charge carried both men sprawling into the mud. Bain's weapon was useless for close work, and knowing that he had failed to stop his man, he struggled fiercely to regain his feet. As he came to his knees, the giant negro gained a like posture facing him—breast to breast. Hackett's right hand still held the knife. He brandished it upward and backward. Like lightning Bain whipped his fist to the other's stomach, warding the knife stroke simultaneously with his left forearm. The fight was over.

Thirty minutes later two white men, and a huge negro with a broken collar bone and with signs of recent and violent nausea, squeezed themselves into the one seat of Bain's mud-spattered yellow roadster. After regaining the pike, the car snorted northward toward Little Rock.

That evening at 9:45 Bain and Bob Schollard met in the lobby of the Capitol hotel.

"Darn your leathery hide!" cried the broker gaily, adjusting his rimless nose glasses. "Here's my check for the fifteen hundred berries; and you may think I'm lying as usual, but I'm a cheerful loser. You deserve it. I could face getting shot, maybe, but a knife in your guts—ugh! Why Willis Babbs says you didn't even lose that semi-permanent, sardonic expression from your almost human face."

The subject of this raillery was quiet—quieter than usual. He fingered Schollard's check, his chin tucked down on his breast. At a distance he was easily the least interesting looking man in the crowded lobby.

"Sam," continued Schollard, "it was white of you to give Willis Babbs the reward, after making the capture yourself. Even winning from me, you won't break even."

"No, I guess not."

Bain stretched the check, an end in each hand, and examined it with the critical attention of a cautious small-town bank cashier.

" 'Sall right?" Schollard was thoroughly amused at the other, whom he never could quite understand.

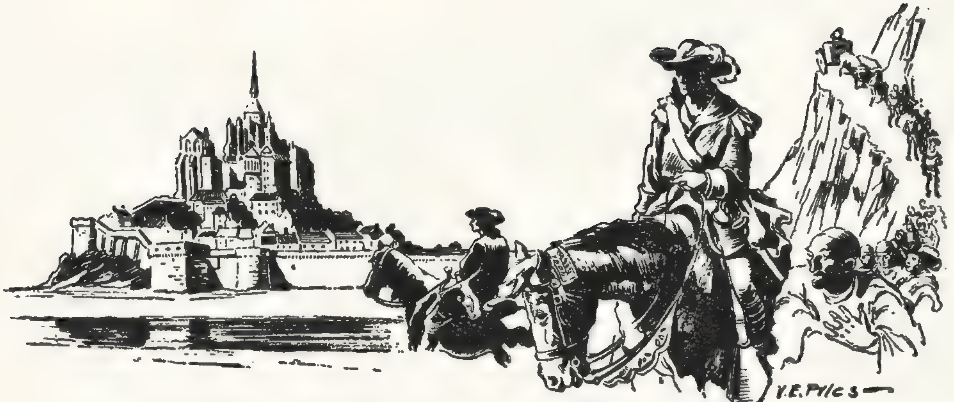
"Sure." Bain carefully tore it to bits.

"Hey! Here! What the ——?"

"I couldn't take money won over old Jack's body. He was on our plantation when I was a kid. That picture—you know—that's me and my brother. Old Jack lacked six bits of being worth a ——, but he was—well, he'd steal a little, and drink, and lie, but—well, he was—"

"A white man's nigger?"

"A white man's nigger."



RODOMONT

A THREE ~ PART STORY ~~~ PART~I

by H. BEDFORD-JONES

Author of "South, West and North," "Brown Kurneval," etc.

CHAPTER I

EAST MEETS WEST

SOME few miles outside Avranches, where the highway leading to that important town dipped into a thickly wooded glade, was a medley of furious excitement—the clash of steel, a shrill voice of terror, cruel laughter. In the road lay a foam-lathered horse, dead; just beyond it, a dead man with a blue bullet-smear between his eyes. Five riderless horses clumped together at the hedge. Back against the green tangle stood a man, feebly fending with his sword the attack of four other men who ringed him in and laughed.

Though his pistol had slain one assailant, this lone defender was no hero. He was a thin, small, dark man, even darker than the Frenchmen around him, ill and exhausted and somewhat wounded. He parried and danced about, shrieking out cries in an unknown tongue. He was extremely terrified and knew nothing whatever of fence, so that the four cavaliers gibed at him and took their time in pinking him, thereby gaining much amusement.

As their splendid garb betrayed, they belonged to the picked corps nominally responsible to the marshal of France and hence named *maréchaussée*, who guarded all these coasts of Normandy and Brittany in the king's name. The day was of early summer in the year 1707.

While this scene was going forward in the glade, two other horsemen were approaching along the winding road, unseen by reason of the sharp curve and the high trees. If they could neither see nor be seen, however, they could hear plainly enough, and in these days it did not pay to rush blindly in upon any roadside combat. They reined in and slipped from their horses, and stole on afoot to discover the cause of the tumult.

These two men were of unusual appearance. One was short, dark, with tremendous breadth of shoulder and huge hands. His swarthy features were marked by a certain alert eagerness, a hawk-like air, and when he smiled it was as if a wolf had grinned. He was dressed as a gentleman, yet at his belt hung a knife and a singular little hand-ax. The second man was tall, with vivid red hair and more vivid blue eyes. His face was as powerfully outlined as his body, with wrinkles about his eyes which spoke of squinting into much sun and wind, and of much laughter also. He carried sword and pistol. Now, with the latter cocked in his hand, he peered through the leafy screen at the affair in the glade beyond. His companion glanced over his arm, then drew back and spoke in English:

"Four cats and a mouse, Rodomont! I'll work around and give the Mohawk yell, and you let fly."

Rodomont nodded. With startling abruptness the dark man seemed to vanish. He wormed his way into the tangle of greenery on their right and disappeared bodily from sight with all the silent swiftness of a wild animal. Rodomont looked at the priming of his pistolet, then returned his attention to the scene beyond.

There in the glade, with the four jesting swordsmen ringing him in, the little man had come to the end of his endurance. A sob of utter exhaustion burst from his lips. He dropped his sword and staggered back against the hedge with arms outflung for support.

"Spare me!" he panted out in a queer French which was hard to understand. "I can—do no more. You have me."

"We have you indeed, vile fox!" responded the leading cavalier with a roar of mirth. "Why His Most Christian Majesty has ordered that a wretch like you be brought back alive, is beyond me. Not to mention the solicitude of M. de Pontchartrain and all the marshals, the royal intendant and our own officers. However, the instructions say nothing at all about wounds. So, little fox, let us revive you first and play with you afterward."

The trapped man had reeled; he caught at the hedge for support, his pallid face sinking on his breast. The leader lunged forward and deliberately, with two swift and precise thrusts of his sword, pinked the unfortunate man through the back of each outflung hand. The wretch started erect, uttered a loud cry of pain.

"Oh, beasts!" he gasped out. "To call yourselves Christian men!"

Once more the leading cavalier laughed and threw up his sword in mock salute.

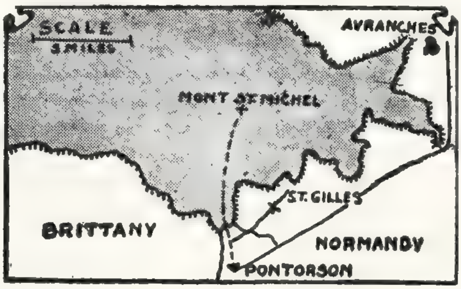
"Oh, well, we'll take you along presently, little fox! First a delicate blood-letting in the legs, to prevent you from running away again."

Those were his last words in life. From the opposite side of the road came a shrill and terrible yell, so innate with ferocity and bestial lust for blood, that all four cavaliers whirled about with startled oaths breaking on their lips. Something glittered in the sunlight, too swift for eye to follow. The leader dropped his red-tipped blade, threw out both arms and fell headlong. Squarely between his eyes, splitting his skull, stood a long-handled, little steel hand-ax.

That frightful and inhuman yell pealed up again. Then from up the road bellowed a pistolet, followed by a yell in French.

"Hasten, comrades—we have them! Kill them all. Kill, kill!"

One of the remaining three cavaliers dropped his blade at the shot, clapped hand to shoulder and went staggering toward the horses. The other two leaped after him. They paused for nothing, but scrambled into the saddle, drove home the spur, swept all five horses away down the road at a mad gallop, and so were gone in a dust cloud. There remained only the dead bodies, the dead horse, the little dark man who stood against the hedge, petrified with astonishment, staring wide-eyed before him.



Then from the opposite hedge broke forth that man who had flung the hatchet. He came forward, grinning in his wolfish manner, while down the road strode Rodomont with a laughing call of assurance to the rescued victim.

"Hola, man! We are friends. You are safe. A good stroke there, St. Martin! Best get the corpses out of sight, for we're on the highway here."

The little dark man uttered a sigh and then toppled forward in a dead faint. Rodomont ran to him, knelt above him for a moment, then rose and shrugged coolly.

"Nothing worth the effort of bandaging. He needs food and drink most of all, I fancy. If you'll get a fire going, I'll bring along the horses."

St. Martin nodded. He strode to the two dead men and lifted them, one by one, and hurled them over the low-trimmed hedge. He did it lightly, effortlessly, with a heave of his huge shoulders that betrayed his enormous strength. He dragged the dead horse into the ditch. Then, swiftly searching the wall of green, he returned with some dry sticks and bark. From about his neck he took a leather bag that had hung under his shirt, opened it, fell to work with flint and steel and tinder. In an incredibly short space of time he had a fire alight. His every move was rapid, sure, silent.

Meanwhlie, the tall Rodomont led the horses down into the glade. These were wretched beasts, poorly apparelled, scarce able to carry their saddles and packs, let alone riders. From one of the bags, Rodomont took a leathern bottle of wine and the body of a fowl from which the head had been wrung. He wasted no time plucking the bird, but sat down by the fire to skin and draw it expertly.

"A spit, St. Martin."

The other man picked up the weapons in the road and flung them after the bodies; he gave the sword of the little dark man to his companion, who pitted the fowl on it and laid it to rest on two forked sticks above the little blaze. Evidently these two men were old campaigners. Rodomont now drew out a pipe, filled it with tobacco, lighted it from the fire and glanced at the motionless figure of the dark man which was propped up against the hedge. He scowled reflectively at his companion.

"Now we'll have to ride back to that crossroad, two miles or so in the rear, and work around to Avranches by that northern road. We don't dare go straight ahead by this highway, or we'd be questioned and suspected. The other road to Avranches is more roundabout, but will take us there eventually."

St. Martin shrugged carelessly.

"If I hadn't stolen this fowl when I had the chance, we'd get no dinner. See here, Rodomont, what the —— will we do after reaching St. Malo? We may have to wait months for a ship, by all accounts. How are we to live, not to mention buying a passage over the water? We're down to our last sol now. If we miss the last of the summer ships, we'll have to wait until spring. —— take it! In this accursed country one must have hard cash for everything. If ever I get back to Canada, plague seize me if I don't appreciate my blessings!"

TALL Rodomont frowned into the little fire and puffed at his pipe.

"I must give up all hope of seeing the place my grandfather came from," he mused aloud. "It's not far away from here, I believe, but this killing will push us forward hard. We can reach St. Malo, and there we must live by selling the horses, until we find boats out-bound for the Newfoundland banks. We may get service aboard one of them, at worst. Why so bitter against your own country, St. Martin?"

"My own country? This?" The other spat. "I'm a Canadian, not a Frenchman. Every time I think of Versailles, I want to curse. —— take that old primped-out doll of a king! He looked me up and down while they told him that I was one of Iberville's men who had fought the English by sea and land. And what did the wrinkled, old, painted fool say to that? Why, he said my style of dress was —— odd. Then he walked away. And I had come from Canada to be presented to him, —— take him! Back to Canada I go, and cruise the woods for castor, and stay there. When I think of how I fought half a life-time for that tottering doll and those insipid, cruel-eyed, women-faced courtiers about him, it makes me sick. The pox on France and everything in her! I'll take my pelts to Boston or Albany after this, rather than obey laws made in Versailles."

Rodomont grinned at this outburst.

"So you started home for Canada, eh?"

"Aye, and fell in with you. A good meeting, too. Odd that I should have been in Fort Nelson two years ago when your ship was captured on the bay! I remember hearing of it."

"And I've been in prison these two years. Would be there yet if some one hadn't remembered the war was over long since, and turned me loose."

"You might have told 'em your grandfather came from France."

Rodomont chuckled.

"And make a bad matter worse? Not I. No, no, I'm no Frenchman, but a Bostonnais, an American. So here the two of us are, beating back home for the new world again like wounded birds, eh? If we only had a trifle more money between us, we'd be all right. —— money! The lack of it is the curse of honest men in this country."

"True enough, on the faith of a Mohawk!" affirmed the Canadian moodily. "You're a good comrade, Rodomont. I'd give much if we were swinging up the trail for Hudson's Bay together, you and I, to loot furs! —— take all Frenchmen and their king the first."

"Amen, amen," said a weak voice.

The two glanced around, to see that the little dark man had opened his eyes and was watching them, a ghastly smile wreathing his thin lips. Rodomont laid down his pipe, seized the wine bottle, and held up the man's head while he poured wine into the sagging mouth. St. Martin removed the fowl from the fire, deftly carved off one or two cooked portions, and thrust them into the hand of the dark man.

"Eat, *mon ami,*" he said. "We must get away from here in a hurry, so waste no time about getting strength."

The other made no reply, but snatched ravenously at the food, gulped it down, grasped other fragments that St. Martin thrust at him; his eyes flashed over them in roving glances that stabbed piercingly into each man. His wounds, which were slight, caused him no particular inconvenience. The flesh and wine immediately gave him strength, brought a little color into his livid cheeks, and presently he sat up.

"So you need money, my friends?" he asked in his queer and halting French.

St. Martin laughed out joyously.

"Need it? Faith, we'd go through hell to get it so we might win home again! And if we ship aboard one of these fishing craft for the banks, we'll go close enough to hell."

"You are not Frenchmen?"

"I am a Canadian."

"A new word to me." The little man looked at Rodomont. "And you?"

"I am from America. I've been a prisoner here in France, and am going home."

"A fur pirate, a Bostonnais!" St. Martin chuckled. "No, if we'd been Frenchmen, my little man, you'd never have been rescued. Eh, Domont?"

The other leaned back against the hedge.

"I heard you talking together. My name is Ketchedourian. Do you know it?"

"Not at all." Roger Domont frowned over his pipe. "Why should I know it? Yet it has the sound of a Mohawk name."

"I am an Armenian."

Ketchedourian winced, put one hand to his head, and pain suffused his eyes suddenly. Then, with an effort, he conquered himself and reached into the pocket of his coat. He produced a small velvet purse, from which he emptied into the dust a dozen coins of broad gold. From his finger he slipped a ring, the bezel of which had been turned inward. It showed a diamond, large and brilliant, obviously of high worth. This ring and these coins he thrust toward Rodomont, who gave him a bleak look.

"Did we rescue you for money? Put it back."

"You do not understand." The dark man gathered his energy. "Look you! Here is all that I have, but now I shan't need it further. You two men are friends, and you need money. Well, I do not pay you for what you have done, but for what you will do. Are you interested?"

Rodomont jerked a nod at him. St. Martin spoke eagerly.

"Aye!"

"Will you accept an errand, you two men—not for me, but for a greater man than I, whom I serve? You, American, are a man to trust. This other with you is a beast, but some beasts are faithful to death. Here is some gold, and with it a ring worth a thousand livres. They are yours, if you will carry out the errand which I have failed in doing."

Roger Domont carefully scrutinized the speaker. Here was a man pursued by the royal forces, undoubtedly for cause. His errand would certainly be an illegal one, and probably would be highly perilous. Indeed, as the Boston man hesitated, the Armenian read his thought and gave him a wan, thin smile.

"I lie not. If any man learns that you have spoken with me, much less helped me, you will never be heard of again. The errand is not easy. If you are caught, your happiest fate will be the Bastille for life. You will answer to the king personally, you understand? This is no affair of bailiffs and *huissiers.* On the other hand, all I ask is that you deliver a letter for me."

"Why not deliver your own letter?" demanded St. Martin bluntly. "A beast, am I? Well, it was the beast's claw that slew your chief tormentor! You are free. We will help you away. Why not go on and deliver your own letter?"

The Armenian took from the velvet purse a blackish pellet of opium, and mouthed it.

"I am ended," he said simply. "They know where I am, have tracked me down. Every road and town swarms with guards. I have been very ill and in prison. My physical strength is gone. You could not hope to escape with me, indeed. After what has happened here, you will be lucky to escape without me! I must submit to my fate. Yet I submit gladly, if only this letter can reach my master."

A hollow laugh came from him as he held out his feeble, hurt hands.

"Look at me! For this poor weak thing they are searching—cavaliers of the marshals, royal cavalry, messengers from Versailles, spies, garrisons of towns, special agents of the minister. Because I am free, regiments are on the march! Yet I am only a domestic, the body servant of my master. What tumult would involve all France, think you, should he escape?"

"Faith of the Mohawk, you must be an important one!" exclaimed St. Martin, staring.

"Nay, but my master is. Well, respond! Yes or no?"

"Say the word, comrade," ejaculated the Canadian. "Me. I would beard Satan himself for enough money to get out of this country. Shall we do it?"

"Aye," said Roger Domont. He knocked out his pipe, put the ring on his finger, divided the golden coins with St. Martin. "Give me the letter, Armenian."

And now, at this, Ketchedourian was all divided between eagerness and sudden hesitation.

"Do you swear to me that—"

"I swear not." Rodomont looked him in the eyes. "But I will earn your money."

"Good. I trust you. If you are captured or even suspected, then destroy the letter. If it is discovered, your fate is certain."

From about his neck, the Armenian lifted a thin silken cord on which was hung a flat packet. The opium had calmed and strengthened him, yet the sparkle in his dark gaze was feverish. He handed the sealed letter to Roger Domont.

"My master is imprisoned in the royal prison of Mont St. Michel," he said. "There he is known only as the Nameless Exile. We know that he is in the room that occupies the third floor of the Perrine Tower. He is never allowed to be seen, he never leaves that room, he does not speak French, yet no one is allowed to so much as call out beneath the tower."

"Good," said St. Martin. "Letter to be delivered to the Tour Perrine, third floor, royal chateau of Mont St. Michel. Good!"

"Your master's name?" demanded Domont.

The Armenian's eyes showed a swift flicker of alarm.

"The knowledge is not necessary and the secret is not mine to impart. It would only increase your danger tenfold. Now get away. Go at once! If any peasant comes past and reports later that you talked with me, you are lost. You can not save me. If you would earn that payment, go, escape quickly!"

The rugged features of the American softened.

"You are a brave man," he said. "It goes badly to leave you to certain fate."

"That is in God's hand. The fate of my master, perhaps, lies in yours."

Roger Domont nodded and rose to his feet.

"Up, St. Martin! Farewell, faithful servant of an unknown man. I salute you."

THE two friends mounted and rode back by the way they had come, leaving the little, dark Armenian sitting against the hedge and staring after them.

No speech passed between the two men. Roger Domont, known from his signature as Rodomont, rode frowningly and intent. St. Martin, who might be a bush-loper and *voyageur* for the fur company, but was none the less a gentleman, caroled a Breton *chanson* gaily enough. Two miles back, they came upon a crossroads, and here turned off the main highway upon a little road which meandered to Avranches by a roundabout way. Then St. Martin asked a question—

"Do you know where this prison is?"

Domont nodded.

"It is only a little out of our way, to the south of Avranches. It is a famous place, an ancient abbey on a pinnacle of rock in the ocean. This errand, I warn you, will be a dangerous one. We may have to go as pilgrims. Mont St. Michel is a great place of pilgrimage from all Europe."

"Bah! You and I are a match for any twelve Frenchmen," said St. Martin with careless conviction. "And if we can do that painted puppet of a king some harm, as seems likely, so much the better! Comrade, you have a smudge of charred wood across your cheek."

Rodomont rubbed at his cheek, and the other laughed, for now the smudge was made worse so that it spread across all his lower face. Not knowing that upon this trifle there hung a great share of destiny, the American shrugged and desisted.

"No matter; I'll wash at some brook. Now, you observe that the letter is in my inside pocket. It anything happens to me, take it and make delivery. We must earn this payment. It is not only the price of our passage to America, but it is the price of that Armenian's life. If we fail in our word, it becomes blood money."

"With all my heart." St. Martin rose in his stirrups and pointed ahead. "Faith of a Mohawk, look there! Instead of avoiding the crowd, we have run into it! An *auberge*, and a village beyond. Now, since we parted with our dinner to the Armenian, let's break one of his gold pieces here."

"No." Domont gazed at the buildings ahead of them, lying at the bottom of a gentle declivity. "There is a coach, and I see horsemen. Well, too late now. If we keep our mouths shut, we've nothing to fear. We'll not stop here for a meal, though. There'll be other inns and smaller places farther on. We'll stop somewhere for the night and make Avranches tomorrow, and the day after, Mont St. Michel."

They clattered down toward the little village, which stood at another crossroads, for in this country there were roads everywhere. Before the inn, which bore the favorite sign of the Cheval Blanc, was standing a huge dust-covered coach, laden with baggage. Standing beside the coach was a plumed cavalier, half in riding attire, half in gay finery, jewels glinting on his fingers. He was a singularly handsome man, dark of eye, across his left cheek a sword scar. He was talking with the occupants of the vehicle, two in number—a girl and an older woman. To one side half a dozen horsemen were grouped about a water trough, and Rodomont perceived that they belonged to the *maréchaussée*.

As the two friends rode on, the coach took its departure, the cavalier bowing low, and both new arrivals crowded to one side of the entrance to let it pass. For a moment Rodomont met the eyes of the girl, full upon him, and she smiled. He removed his hat and bowed in the saddle. No painted and powdered court beauty was she, but a girl with a crown of golden hair, a smile so frank and unaffected that his heart leaped. Then, as the coach rolled away, he felt a touch and turned. At his stirrup stood the jeweled cavalier, regarding him narrowly.

"Your name, Monsieur Blackface, and errand," said the cavalier brusquely.

Domont gave him a slow scrutiny. In the man's voice and air was authority, yet to judge from his garb he was no officer.

"Either," said the American coolly, "your remark is an insolence or a justified query. Which is it, Monsieur Impertinence?"

"My faith!" The other laughed in drawling contempt. "Can one be insolent to a fellow of your quality, indeed? I am the Comte de Lussan. Speak."

"And I am a gentleman of America, of equal or better birth than you."

Domont regarded the other gravely, and De Lussan flushed slightly—then shrugged.

"Well, then, in the King's name! I am the delegate of His Majesty on special affairs. Do I have to arrest you before you declare yourself?"

"Nay, I have every respect for His Majesty," said Dumont, whereat St. Martin stifled a grin. "Here are my papers. You will see that M. de Pontchartrain requests that I be allowed to leave France unhindered and without molestation on my good conduct."

The name of the all-powerful minister had instant effect. De Lussan, with a curt acknowledgment, returned the document Rodomont had given him, and looked around at St. Martin.

"Dismount, fellow!"

"Go to the ——, fellow!" snapped the Canadian. "I am the Sieur de St. Martin of Canada. If you want to read my passport, reach for it."

White with restrained anger, de Lussan reached up, took the Canadian's document, and read it. He handed it back without comment, turned away, and flung a curt order at his men. A moment more he had mounted and was riding away down the yellow road with them. St. Martin chuckled, as his horse pushed forward to the trough.

"Faith of a Mohawk, that fellow would be glad to clap us into jail!"

Domont shrugged and looked down at the innkeeper, who was advancing to them.

"Bring us a cup of wine each. We'll not dismount," he said. "Whose coach was that, leaving just as we arrived?"

"Ah, monsieur! That was the daughter or niece or wife or wench or something of the most eminent Baron de Karque, whom she goes to join."

"And who the ——," queried Rodomont whimsically, "is this Baron de Karque? A Breton name, perhaps?"

"Not at all. The great baron, monsieur, is spending the summer at his abbey."

"At his abbey? Is he married, and an abbot to boot?"

The innkeeper grinned.

"He is a famous man, monsieur, a great lord of Germany, and he is the commendatory abbot of Mont St. Michel. May I remark that monsieur's face is somewhat obscured by grime?"

Roger Domont dismounted and washed his face at the trough. It was well for him that he had not found an earlier opportunity.

CHAPTER II

ROGER ONE AND ROGER TWO

ON THE same afternoon which in the highways and byways of Normandy witnessed the foregoing events, the episcopal residence near the Cathedral of Avranches was witnessing a very different sort of event. It appeared wholly unrelated to the former happenings in any way, shape or manner, and yet upon it as upon a hinge swung the entire fate of the Armenian's letter, the man who bore it and all connected with it.

Up those narrow and winding hill-streets of ancient Avranches, creaked the coach of Baron de la Villeneuve, with postillions yelling, driver flicking savage whip at the populace, and a groom riding behind it with a led horse, saddled. Out upon the scattering townfolk glared M. le Baron, erect and savage, a terrible man, renowned for his inflexible cruelty as a magistrate, yet also known for his proud sense of personal honor. He looked not unlike a wild boar, a vicious old boar with red hair and long tusks, and acted the part.

With him in the coach sat his eldest son, Roger d'Aumont, very handsome in his uniform as a captain in the regiment of la Fére. Between father and son, as all men knew, there was no lost love, for the son was a merry wastrel, a savage drunkard and a reckless blade. Sieur d'Aumont had red hair, like many a Norman of the ancient viking strain, wore a red mustache and chin-tuft, and had a very eager eye for a pretty girl, a drinking bout or a duel. Mad fighter as he was, he was known to be a poor swordsman. By an odd chance, good luck in his last duel had incurred misfortune, the hurt man being a favorite of M. de Pontchartrain, and so M. d'Aumont went home to cool his heels in disgrace.

The coach flung around the last turn, climbing laboriously toward the heights which bore that cathedral at whose door Henry II of England knelt to receive absolution for à Beckett's murder. Now the baron regarded his son with an air grimly pregnant.

"Your last chance," he said gruffly. "Give up all these mad ambitions of yours, and you may return with me."

"You grow very tiresome, M. le Baron," said the younger man, giving his father look for look. "Give up my ambitions? But that is all I desire. I'll gladly yield the title to my brother and go seeking my fortune in the new world. What more is to be said?"

"You and your fortune!" The baron swore whole-heartedly. "Your purse is crammed with gold at this moment!"

"It is not a question of gold." The son gestured rather wearily, as one who rehearses an oft-spun argument. "I am heartily sick of all this life. My only wish is to go away to Canada and there seek—"

"Go to the —— and seek perdition," snarled the baron and turned his broad back.

The son grimaced complacently and then leaned far out to blow a kiss after a pretty girl. She smiled, as did most girls on the handsome captain, and Sieur d'Aumont twirled his mustache gallantly. He knew well enough what was ahead of him, and rather looked forward to it as a change of scene.

The coach went on. The massive gates of the episcopal residence swung open to receive it, and in the courtyard the equipage swung to a halt.

"Stay here until I send for you," said the baron, and alighted. He took a pinch of snuff, then marched in to his audience with the bishop and the royal intendant.

The spiritual and temporal rulers of this corner of France received their visitor in ceremonious fashion, which the bluff Norman baron brooked impatiently enough. At length the doors of the large chamber, which overlooked the monastery gardens and the sea, were closed, and the three men sat alone at a heavy carven table. The baron came bluntly to the affair in hand.

"Gentlemen, I have requested from His Majesty a *lettre de cachet* against the person of the Sieur d'Aumont my son, who is disobedient, mutinous and of dissipated life. What of it?"

The intendant looked somewhat uneasy. The bishop, a genial nobleman who was never uneasy, smiled at the baron and made response.

"The order has been received; but I regret to state that explicit instructions have also been received as to its issuance, and M. de Fontette here has been expressly directed to communicate these instructions to you. A written report must be countersigned by both of us in regard to the matter. You will perceive that His Majesty, due to your high favor in his sight, has been pleased to dispense with the usual procedure in this case. Perhaps my recommendation had something to do with it, also."

The baron growled at that, and settled himself savagely in his chair, perceiving that the bishop was taking a roundabout course. Then M. de Fontette gathered up his courage and spoke out.

"M. le Baron, I regret that these charges you have preferred are not sufficient."

"Not sufficient?" exploded the baron vehemently. "When you shut up any fool or madman, when you send to a dungeon any petty criminal who can pay the expenses of his keep? When—"

"Your pardon, your pardon. But consider, I beg you!" M. de Fontette, newly arrived from the south, was anything but certain of his authority against these mad Normans. "By the act of parliament and the royal declaration of 1648, it is absolutely forbidden that any subject of the king should be imprisoned by royal order more than twenty-four hours without examination before a tribunal."

"You fool, does not every magistrate know that?" roared the baron, then calmed himself. "Your pardon, monsieur. Continue, in the ——'s name!"

"My instructions on this head are precise, and from the secretary of state himself," pursued M. de Fontette. "No citizen is lightly to be deprived of his liberty. It does not suffice that his family desired his imprisonment, but his conduct must be such that he is a menace to society and a taint upon the honor of his house. These royal exiles are not to be easily—"

"Name of the ——, I do not ask a lecture on the law!" ejaculated the testy baron, losing his temper again. He turned his empurpled visage to the bishop. "My lord, come to the point!"

"I think," intervened the bishop smoothly, "that you slightly misapprehend our friend here. It is necessary to assure him of the vital importance of converting the Sieur d'Aumont from a soldier into a prisoner, or rather, an exile of the king. The arguments which will so assure him, would naturally prove sufficient at Versailles. Now, as you have informed me, this unhappy Sieur d'Aumont is an incorrigible drunkard, of a notoriously brawling disposition, and his love affairs—"

"He is mad! He is absolutely mad!" declared the baron. "He wants to give up his inheritance and go to Canada. He's gone mad, I tell you!"

The effect of these words was remarkable. The bishop looked up to an invisible heaven, rolled his eyes and folded his hands with an air of complacent finality. The intendant stared with fallen jaw, then muttered something inaudible.

"What did you say?" snapped the baron at him.

"I said why in the fiend's name didn't you make that charge in the first place?" retorted the badgered officer. "Instead of all this talk about mutiny and bad conduct, why not have said that he was mad? That simplifies the whole affair."

"Oh!" grunted the baron. "Does it? Then the charge is made. Now what?"

"Evidence of his madness," said the intendant. "It is necessary, of course. This report must be clear as daylight. Besides the fact that he wishes to give up his heritage and go to Canada, which in itself confirms the charge, what additional evidence have you?"

The baron seemed about to explode once more, when the bishop made a slight gesture and leaned over toward the royal officer, in whose ear he whispered five words. At once the face of the intendant cleared in relief. It was as if those five words had settled every doubt, had made the affair certain beyond any mistake. From his pocket he drew a folded, sealed and addressed paper, which he handed to the bishop.

The baron had been watching this in no little astonishment, but now a glare of satisfaction filled his eyes. The paper bore the bishop's seal, and the worthy prelate, smiling, now touched a bellcord, and a servitor appeared.

"You will bid the Sieur d'Aumont to our presence," said the bishop, and then turned to his guest. "I presume, M. le Baron, that the usual course will be followed?"

The baron stiffened.

"This rascal may be a madman, but his honor is mine. Naturally there will be no arrest."

The intendant nodded, and the bishop smiled. Then the door was opened, and Roger d'Aumont entered the room with a dignified bow to the three men at the table. Aware of why he had been summoned, he eyed them with a certain insolence, a cool disdain, that became him well and lightened the heavy stamp of liquor in his face. The intendant rose and bowed, and handed him the letter.

"Monsieur, here is a letter from His Majesty to the prior of the abbey of Mont St. Michel, which I have the honor to request that you will present in person."

D'Aumont bowed to the intendant. M. le Baron spoke out savagely.

"And when you've given up your mad ideas about Canada, you may communicate with me."

D'Aumont looked at him gravely and bowed.

"I fear Canada would be preferable to the sacred Mont, but I have no choice."

"The letter," intervened the bishop suavely, to avoid an outbreak between father and son, "is an expression of the royal wish in regard to the Sieur Roger d'Aumont. It will be presented and honored by the said gentleman, I am sure."

D'Aumont bowed to him.

"I assure you of the fact, monsieur. Gentlemen, I thank you for the honor of presenting this letter from His Majesty."

* * *

FLICKING an imaginary bit of dust from his gold-laced coat, he turned and departed. The baron glared after him with anger, the bishop, with smiling admiration, the intendant, with relief. The royal officer now rose and took his departure also. When he had gone, the baron went up to the bishop, who was an intimate friend, and took him by the arm.

"Now come, tell me something! What was it you whispered to that fool of an intendant which so swiftly convinced him that my son was mad?"

The bishop smiled slightly.

"My dear friend, this intendant is newly appointed and comes from the south. He is not yet accustomed to our Normans, and he is a man imbued with all the southern superstitions. I merely appealed to his superstition, in order to further—"

"Yes, but what did you say to him?"

"I told him this," and the bishop repeated five words which, in English, would become four. "I said, 'He has red hair!' That was all. That was enough. It is common belief that a red-haired man is possessed of the devil."

The baron took a step backward.

"Yes, but name of the fiend! I have red hair myself!"

The prelate sank back into his chair and held his sides with laughter.

Meantime, Roger d'Aumont swung into the saddle of the led horse that had been brought behind the coach and rode from the courtyard. Outside, on the face of the hill, he drew rein. There, miles away against the sea horizon, hung a shimmering miracle, a fairy pyramid of towers surmounted by a cross that glittered in the rays of the afternoon sun. This was Mont St. Michel, seeming as though hung between earth and sea and heaven. Sieur d'Aumont regarded it for a long moment, then his lips twitched.

"My revered father and my more revered spiritual father, you made one ghastly error!" he murmured whimsically. "You charged the honor of Roger d'Aumont with the delivery of this letter. Well and good. You forgot, however, to specify immediate delivery, and so much the worse!"

With a laugh, he touched the horse with his spurs and departed at a mad gallop.

A league outside Avranches, on the south road that wound among the hills, there was an old inn by the name of the Rock That Boils. Among those who knew good wines and good cuisine, this inn was in high favor. One end of its big room was given over to an immense hearth, where a system of counterweights kept a ten-foot spit of polished steel turning over the drip pans, and this spit was continually garnished with all manner of meat and fowls. The huge and rubicund host, who had once been cook to the prior of St. Benoit in St. Malo, favored his own wares with great relish.

To this retreat, one of his favorite haunts, Roger d'Aumont turned his steps. His worthy father would have to pay seven hundred livres a year for his keep at the Royal Exile of Mont St. Michel, so he determined to spend his pocketful of gold and have a last good carouse before delivering that *lettre de cachet.*

After some loitering along the way—the Sieur d'Aumont undeniably had an eye for a pretty face, and these were not rare here in southern Normandy—he reached the inn, beside its farmhouse and smithy, about the sunset hour. A boy ran out to take his horse as he dismounted. Roger met the portly host in the doorway, laughed and clasped him in an exuberant girth-shaking hug.

"Ha, my old rascal! Now we shall have a bout of the best, you and I. Look out for your laurels, old tun-belly! Under the table you go this night. What do you say to a bird or two from M. de Kerlain's preserves, eh? Shall we sally forth—"

"For the love of Sainte Anne, my lord, guard your tongue!" exclaimed the host in an access of terror. "Poaching is a joke to you, but it means death to me. There are two travelers inside here!"

"Eh? Then so much the better. We shall have company," declared Roger gaily. He flung out one hand, and a shower of gold coins shot across the threshold to clink on the stone-flagged floor inside. The portly host, however, caught his arm and dragged him aside.

"Hark you, my lord. It is a strange thing! These two men talk together in a queer rattling language that sounds like the Moorish tongue. At St. Benoit I have heard the prior, Dom Nicolas Hougats, speak all these languages of the orient. Yet one of these men calls the other by your name, Roger, and that man is the image of you, my lord."

"Very well. I'm thirsty as a soul in ——, so let us behold this marvel," exclaimed d'Aumont, and pushed on into the inn room.

Two men sat talking in a corner beside the wide fireplace, whence issued a most appetizing aroma as the spit slowly turned and four fat birds browned. It was too dark to see the two men distinctly, but d'Aumont advanced toward them and bowed.

"Messieurs, I am promising myself the pleasure of a drinking bout against our host yonder, who I assure you is not to be despised at trencher or bottle. To find other gentlemen here is a pleasure. Will you do us the honor of joining us?"

"With right good will, monsieur, since we are spending the night here." Roger Domont rose and stepped out a pace, so that the firelight fell upon him. "My friend yonder is from Canada, where he holds the siegneury of St. Martin."

"From Canada!" cried d'Aumont, and opened his arms. "Sieur St. Martin, I embrace you with all my heart! The ambition of my life is to leave this country and go to Canada, hunt the redskins and English, find the beaver skins, seek glory and adventure!"

St. Martin responded with a bearlike hug that made the noble gasp. D'Aumont escaped laughingly.

"Good! Well met. You shall tell me of Canada, eh? Messieurs, I am Roger d'Aumont, son of the Baron de la Villeneuve."

"Eh? Eh?" St. Martin peered at him. "The ——! But my friend here is also Roger Domont, and may the fiend swallow me if he is not you in the face, barring the scalplocks on your lips!"

The two Rogers stared each at the other, and the glow of firelight trickily increased the keen resemblance between them. There was the same vivid red hair, the same vividly blue eye, the same contour of brow and nostril and chin. There the resemblance ceased. The American's eyes were not so merry and reckless, were more icily cold than those of the Frenchman; he bore no dissipated air, and lacked a certain fiery intolerance that sat in the other's features. However, the difference was a slight one. Domont put out his hand with a laugh.

"Well met, monsieur. I believe, indeed, that we are cousins of a sort. My grandfather left this part of France and settled in Boston, and my father changed the name to conform with American ways. D'Aumont and Domont—the same name, you perceive."

"Ha, right, right!" D'Aumont gripped the extended hand, then embraced the American vigorously. "My heart to you, fair cousin! I remember well the story. My grandfather's brother fled the country—when was it? Under Richelieu, Cinq Mars, La Rochelle—oh, I've forgotten the accursed time.

Or was it some plot against Mazarin? No matter. Your face is sufficient guarantee. How now, fat tunbelly! Could ye not recognize my cousin, who is also Sieur d'Aumont? Now, if he were in my shoes, he would be termed Rodomont."

St. Martin uttered a bellow of merriment.

"Faith of a Mohawk, but he is so known! And for the same reason, I'll warrant—a play on the signature and the name."

All four men broke into a roaring gale of laughter. The boy had fetched wine and was filling three cups. D'Aumont forced the fat host to fill one for himself, and thus was begun the evening.

Doors were barred and candles were lighted, the birds were taken from the spit and replaced by others, rarer and more royal fowl poached from the near-by estates of a Breton noble. Dusty, cobwebbed bottles came up from the cellar, the boy was banished to the upstairs room, and mine host assumed full charge.

Across the table the three men talked eagerly, rapidly, stirred into ready intimacy by the singular chance which had brought them together. Domont told how he had been captured by two French frigates in Hudson's Bay, while fur-raiding. And how, released, he was now homing again toward Boston to seek his fortunes anew. St. Martin chipped in with tales of Rodomont the fur-pirate, nor would he hush until d'Aumont plied him avidly for information about the new world.

He described his longing to get out of France and roam, an atavistic tendency due to old viking forebears, and confided to them that he had broken absolutely with his worthy parent and was in prime disgrace at court. In twenty minutes the three men were firm friends, in an hour they were intimates. Yet Domont said nothing of the letter he carried, and d'Aumont did not mention the other letter that lay in his own pocket.

By the time mine host cleared away the dishes and joined them with more bottles of wine and a flagon of fiery Calvados apple brandy, not to mention some very racy monastic tales, the party was grown decidedly merry. Sieur d'Aumont, enthusiastic in the extreme over his newfound cousin, insisted on increasing the resemblance by chopping off his mustache and tuft of beard. To this task St. Martin applied his razor-edged tomahawk, and was then forced to display his skill in hurling the weapon, which he did to the vast admiration and interest of d'Aumont and mine host. Presently d'Aumont confided that he would assuredly never be allowed to leave France and seek Canada, whereat St. Martin proffered a maudlin suggestion which bore dire results.

"Faith of a Mohawk, listen to me! Crop that long hair of yours and stain it black, then powder it, and you're a different man! Then ride to St. Malo with us, and we'll all go to Canada in company!"

D'AUMONT acclaimed the idea uproariously, and so did the fat host, for whose head the old Calvados had proved a trifle too old. No sooner said than done. St. Martin put his knife into play, trimmed the long red locks and, amid hilarious laughter, the host rubbed the better part of an ink-horn into d'Aumont's head, spilling much of it over his face in the process. Roger Domont, who had kept well clear of the apple brandy, smoked his pipe and looked on with twinkling eyes.

"But, the ——!" cried out d'Aumont suddenly. He staggered to his feet, clapping hand to pocket. "I forgot something. What was it? Oh, yes. The letter, the accursed letter! The letter confided to the honor of Roger d'Aumont! Here is the thing."

He flung out upon the table a letter which bore a seal and superscription. The fat host, by this time quite forgetful of himself, seized and held it to a candle's light. He knew the seal, as well he might, having more than once experienced its jurisdiction.

"Seal of his grace, the bishop!" he declared unsteadily. "Can't read writing, but I can read that seal. Bishop of Avranches, —— fly away with him!"

"Oh, yes, the bishop," said d'Aumont vaguely.

He poured himself another drink of the fiery brown Calvados, half fell back into his seat, sipped his drink, and then blinked down frowningly at the letter.

"Foxy old bishop! Seems to me he did give me the letter. No, it was somebody else, pox upon me if I can remember! Honor pledged to be delivered by Roger d'Aumont. Here, coz Roger! See who the —— it's addressed to, for the letters are all curiously blurred to my eye. Whoever wrote it must have used a queer quill."

Domont reached out, took the letter, and read the superscription aloud:

"To our dear and well beloved Dom Julien Doyte, superior of the abbey of Mont St. Michel."

"Very 'portant letter," hiccuped the fat host seriously. "Letter from bishop to prior of the Mount. I tell you, I have reason to know that accursed seal! Bread and water for a week."

D'Aumont broke in with a nod of confirmation.

"True enough, it's the seal of the bishop. I remember now. Letter had to be delivered without fail by Roger d'Aumont. But if I do it, how the —— can I appear with my hair blackened? Any one would know I'm not Roger d'Aumont any more! And how can I go on to St. Malo with you gen'lemen if I'm going to Mont St. Michel. Oh, the fiend seized me! I'm all tongue-twisted and in a muddle."

He broke off laughingly.

It was quite true that the *lettre de cachet* had been sealed by the bishop, after a careful perusal of the contents. Despite their name, these direct orders of the king were rarely closed by the royal seal, which was a graceful touch reserved for notable political exiles, as the recipients were termed.

"Give me the letter," said Roger Domont suddenly. "I'll pass for you and make the delivery. I have another letter to deliver there. It fits in well. You can ride to St. Malo and meet us there."

"Death of my life, it is done!" bawled d'Aumont in delight. "Pledge me your honor!"

"It is pledged."

D'Aumont swayed to his feet, reached across the table, and managed to embrace the American in maudlin joy, his ink-besmeared countenance set in a laugh of wild merriment.

"Remarkable idea, cousin, cousin Roger! Solved all the difficulty. Honor of the house in your hands, good hands."

"How do I reach the place from here?" demanded Domont. "By way of Avranches?"

"Not at all," bleated the fat host. "Go to Pontorson, two leagues from the Mont, the nearest town. Water all 'round the place at high tide, quicksands at low tide. Most devilish place to get at."

From the darkness of the corner, where a ladder ascended to the upper floor, there came a shrill cry in the voice of the boy.

"Messieurs! Messieurs! There are horses coming at the gallop, the *maréchaussée!*"

"Bring 'em in to join us!" roared d'Aumont.

The host, however, came to his feet with sudden pallor in his rubicund visage.

Outside there sounded a rushing thunder of hooves, sharp cries, a rattle of steel. A fist pounded on the door and then the butt of a pistolet.

"Open, rats, open!" blared a strong voice. "Open in the king's name!"

Mine host waddled hastily toward the door. Roger d'Aumont, with a furious oath, shoved his chair back crashingly and stood fumbling at his sword.

"Call me a rat, do you? Foul fiend strike you! Let the scoundrels inside and I'll show 'em."

At a sign from Domont, St. Martin seized the angry, fuddled Norman and bore him down into a seat. The doors flew open. Into the room surged half a dozen cavaliers, headed by an officer whose sword-point threatened the host.

"Who's here?" demanded the latter. "Speak up, you fat rogue!"

"Mercy, M. du Moulin, mercy!" quivered the host, recoiling from the bared steel. "Here are only the Sieur d'Aumont and his cousin and the Sieur St. Somebody, St. Martin."

Roger Domont, whose head was fairly clear, stepped forward.

"What does this intrusion mean, monsieur?" he demanded.

The officer peered at him, then uttered an exclamation and a burst of laughter.

"Roger, and shaved! Pardon me, my friend. —— shrive me if I thought to find you in this kennel, and shaved! Tonsure next, eh?" He sobered suddenly. "Two cavaliers of the guard were murdered today on the Avranches road, and we're scouring the country. Have you encountered any strangers?"

"My cousin, here, and Sieur St. Martin from Canada, lately presented to His Majesty at Versailles," said Domont quietly "No one else has been here. Come, join us over a bottle and let your men ride on."

"Thanks, I've no time for it now. A man with his head split, imagine! Split by some devilish weapon flung through the air!

Well, we must on our way. Drink a health for me, d'Aumont, until our next meeting!"

The party surged out and were gone. Then Roger d'Aumont broke clear, leaped erect, and his sword flashed forth.

"Call me a rat, you gang of scullions! Rat in your throat! Have at you."

Eyes blazing with fury, he lurched across the floor toward the entrance. The host tried to block him and failed. Outside the cavaliers were mounting. Then St. Martin was over the table in one leap. If the drunken noble got outside and attacked the guards, there would be no end of explanations and inquiries and worse. St. Martin caught the Norman at the doorway and whirled him around by the shoulder.

An oath of insane rage burst from d'Aumont, and he lunged. The Canadian evaded the thrust, skipped nimbly aside, and d'Aumont drove at him again with transferred fury. The sword point pierced his left arm above the elbow. St. Martin uttered one savage snarl, caught up one long billet of firewood and hurled it. Struck fairly across the head by that blow which would have felled an ox, Roger d'Aumont staggered against the wall and then collapsed in a limp heap.

Meanwhile, the fat host had hurriedly closed the door and barred it. Standing with his back against it, he stared at the scene before him. He had been sobered by fright.

"And now, the devil himself to pay!" he cried, and crossed himself nimbly. "Here is the Sieur d'Aumont dead, and heard you what was said, Sieur St. Martin? A man of the royal guard with his head chopped open? And it is you, you who throw axes through the air, for whom they are seeking! We shall all be broken on the wheel for this."

"Peace, you fat fool!" growled St. Martin, and looked at his comrade. "Rodomont, this burly——knows. Shall I slit his throat?"

"No. He is to be trusted." Roger Domont came forward. "Let's see your arm. Ah! Not bad. Here, master host, get this wound bound up. I'll attend to our friend here."

"He's not dead," said the Canadian sourly, as Domont knelt above the limp figure by the wall. Examining the ink-stained scalp, feeling that injured head, Domont rose with a grave face.

"Not dead, but you've broken his skull. He must have a surgeon."

He stood watching, while St. Martin's wound was bound up by the unhappy host. Then he spoke, quietly taking charge of the situation.

"Sieur d'Aumont is badly hurt, but the damage is far from mortal. Can you keep him here, fat one? He has money. Pay yourself from his gold. It is evident that he wants to keep his identity secret, therefore respect his wish. When he is able to travel, he can come on to St. Malo. Better yet, I'll return here for him. What say you?"

The fat man quivered.

"Yes, I can arrange it, monsieur. The surgeon at Pontorson is a discreet man. The surgeon of the town, not of the prison, remember!"

It was arranged that the two friends, departing early in the morning, should send back the surgeon from Pontorson, and on this they carried d'Aumont up to bed.

When they departed at dawn, the hurt nobleman was still unconscious, but without fever. Whether his coma came from his injury or from a drunken stupor, was by no means certain.

CHAPTER III

THREE GENTLEMEN ARE ASTONISHED

IT WAS a new Roger Domont who rode from the little inn long ere the sun was up. He had now doffed most of his rough and sober costume. and wore instead the gold-laced uniform, the plumed hat, the sword of Roger d'Aumont. Also, he was mounted on the excellent blooded horse of his distant relative, and he was in a hurry.

"We owe my good cousin much, St. Martin. I hope he is not seriously hurt," he observed as they wound along the yellow hill road that lay before them.

"Needs must when the devil drives. How do we owe him so much?"

"That letter he gave me to deliver. This Mont St. Michel is a royal prison, and we might have found entry very difficult and our errand still more difficult. But now it seems that the way is cleared by this letter from the Bishop. Also, I shall take occasion to pay my respects to this German nobleman, this Baron de Karque or whatever his name is."

"Eh?" St. Martin frowned. "I do not see how he is a German baron and at the same time an abbot."

"Not an abbot, but a commendatory abbot!" Domont chuckled. "That is to say he is abbot in name only, enjoys the revenues and the titles, and is doubtless some highly-favored man at court. The real ruler of the place will be the prior."

"Well, why are you in so confounded a hurry?" grumbled the other. "The place is solid. It has been there a long time. It cannot escape us."

"I've been calculating." Domont chuckled, and drew forth a rude charcoal-drawn map which the fat host had provided. "Here, look at this, woods-loper!"

"Well, I see it," grunted St. Martin. "I see it. What is that brain of yours driving at?"

"Why, just this! How far will a huge coach, drawn by weary horses, go in one afternoon? Not far, you may be sure! It must be a good five leagues from the spot where we met that coach yesterday to Pontorson. On from there to the Mont is another two leagues, but it is possible to reach the Mont only at low tide, since the abbey stands out in the sea. Moreover, the coach carries two women. After these long leagues up hill and down dale, they will not be up and about at any early hour."

The Canadian drove a sharp look at his companion.

"The girl with the yellow hair, eh?"

"Precisely. Some relative of this German baron who is graciously visiting his titular abbey at present. We may be in time to catch her at Pontorson."

"And why catch her?"

"In order to gain the Mont in her company. We need all the good impression we can create, if we're to earn the Armenian's pay."

"Ah! Is that the only reason?"

"No," said Domont frankly. "I'd like to see her again."

The other grinned.

"Well said! She'll remember you. Yesterday she laughed at your black-smudged face, though you look very different now. So that is why we go to Pontorson!"

"We must go there in any event. Presently we shall come into the highway, which leads to Pontorson. From there is the only means of access to the Mont, across the sands. They are dangerous, those sands."

"It's a most complicated trail. I don't like you in the guise of your cousin, either. I begin to wish you had not promised to deliver his letter for him. He may look like you, but he's not you. Something confoundedly unstable about him."

"Thanks." Domont chuckled. "Wait and see. We're not in Mont St. Michel as yet."

St. Martin shrugged.

Once the long hill was topped, they put the horses to full speed and thereafter spared the animals no whit, for speed was essential. By sunrise they were in the main road, passed Pontaubault without pause and spurred for Pontorson with the sun at their backs. So, still early, they topped the hill above Pontorson, which was little more than a straggling village dominated by the Charité, a hospital and prison for the poorer folk who could not afford the luxuries of the Mont. And now this sea-girt goal of theirs burst full into view at its best and most splendid aspect.

Tide was at flood. Surrounded by a league of water inshore, where the sails of fishing craft flashed in the sunlight red and brown, the pinnacled abbey rose out of the sea like a thing created by fairy hands. Small wonder that St. Martin caught his breath as he gazed, or that the eye of Domont kindled with admiration. It appeared that those towers must have been first built in the air, to then take root in the sea, rather than to have been reared upward by puny men. Seeing it thus, one could well comprehend why the usual term applied to the church and the whole Mont was, simply, the Marvel. A marvel it was, outside and inside the finest flower of medieval architecture to be found in all France.

"On!' said Domont, and they pushed their foam-lathered horses on down the gentle winding slope that led into Pontorson.

With the tide high and the sea surrounding the Mont, it was now certain that they would find their quarry in the town, and the search was no difficult one. The place was largely composed of inns, which battened upon the pilgrims who flooded hither from half Europe. Ahead, by the turn of the road, lay the tavern of the White Horse, with the baggage-laden coach standing in its courtyard. When the two men rode up, they saw a dozen saddled horses being hastily baited and, as Domont dismounted, there came swaggering from the inn no other than his acquaintance of the previous afternoon, Comte de Lussan, special delegate of the king.

"Ha, Rodomont!" he cried gaily, then halted and stared. "What the ——! You have shaved! And here is that rascally siegneur from Canada."

The count stopped short, gazing in amazement at St. Martin, whom he recognized at once. It was evident that he took Domont for the Sieur d'Aumont. Two other officers emerged from the inn, and the situation was awkward. St. Martin saved it by his quick wit. With a gesture toward de Lussan, he turned and addressed Domont.

"Here, Sieur Roger, is that troublesome sprig of nobility of whom I spoke to you. Faith, I thought yesterday that he and my friend the Bostonnais would come to swords! Since you appear to know him, you may vouch for my honesty of heart and my spiritual welfare. He has already examined my papers."

Domont smiled.

"Why so astounded, M. de Lussan?" he asked. "Do you know this excellent gentleman from Canada, this Sieur St. Martin? Surely you remember his presentation to His Majesty?"

De Lussan scowled a little.

"Hm! I might ask why he is now with you, Roger, when only yesterday he was keeping company with a black-faced rogue from America, who, as I now recall, somewhat favored you—"

"Eh?" Domont assumed the brusk arrogance of his cousin. "Eh? Monsieur, do I hear you aright? I am a blackamoor, am I?"

"Oh, —— take you touchy Normans!" cried de Lussan, and laughed out. "No, no, my friend, you misconstrued my words."

"Then allow me to present M. de St. Martin. He was fighting with another man last evening when I encountered them. A man, indeed, with a smudge of black across his face! He left the fellow hurt, and wanting to see the famous Mont, he rode on with me.'"

"Ah, that accounts for it, naturally." De Lussan bowed to the Canadian, then clapped Domont on the shoulder and uttered a low laugh. "I heard you were bound for the Mont, Roger. A family matter, I understand. It has nothing to do with that duel behind the Palais Royal."

Domont shook his head and smiled, not being very well able to do anything else. It was obvious that de Lussan knew the real d'Aumont and was thoroughly deceived.

"Well, luck favor you!" went on the other easily. "I've had the good fortune to gather in an *évadé* and have despatched him under guard to the Bastille, and now I shall be some little while at Mont St. Michel on other business for His Majesty."

"That's good news." Domont was mystified yet dared not betray his ignorance. "I suppose this Canadian siegneur may see the Mont as a pilgrim? Perhaps, on the strength of a letter which I carry to the prior."

The count broke into a roar of laughter.

"I was in Avranches last night and heard about that letter, aye! We may house St. Martin in a dungeon for a night or two, if you like."

St. Martin met this pleasantry with a grimace. Then, however, the two officers behind de Lussan came forward and bowed to Domont, gravely.

"Monsieur," said one, "may we have a word with you apart if M. de Lussan will pardon our importunity?"

"With all my heart." De Lussan turned again to the inn. "Roger, I'll order something to eat for you and St. Martin. You've not had your morning draught yet? Don't detain him overlong, de Beauveu! You gentlemen have already drunk, I think? Good."

THE count vanished. The two officers met the puzzled gaze of Domont with somber looks, obviously antagonistic.

"I trust you recall the occasion of our last meeting, monsieur?" asked de Beauveu.

"Perfectly," returned Domont. "Should I be detained from my morning repast for that reason, monsieur?"

"For that reason we have come here to detain you from your mission to the Mont, of which we have heard."

"The ——! All the world appears to know my errand there!"

The officer shrugged.

"We arrived here yesterday to intercept you. I trust that you will find the time convenient to settle our slight affair. De Lussan will keep the chevaliers of the guard away while we step outside to a garden that is ready to hand."

A question of a duel, then! Domont laughed at this, but it was no laughing matter, if he were to maintain his new identity. He turned to St. Martin.

"My friend, join M. de Lussan, I beg of you. He will be eager to hear of your encounter with the Bostonnais. Your wound does not trouble you?"

"Not in the least." St. Martin had no idea of abandoning his comrade, for he could not miss the significance of the words that had been exchanged. "If you require a second, I am at your service, with knife or tomahawk."

"First a bite to eat." Domont nodded pleasantly to the officers. "Make what arrangements seem best, gentlemen, and presently I shall be at your service."

They bowed. Domont was advancing toward the inn, when from somewhere among the upper rooms came the frightened scream of a woman, followed almost at once by the roar of a pistol. St. Martin jerked about, toward the stone stairs that wound upward from a corner of the inn courtyard.

"This way, Rodomont!"

They leaped up the stairs together. The court below erupted with questioning, shouting men who blocked the approaches. The stairs took them into a passage, where they had only to follow the acrid scent of gunpowder to reach a door that stood open. Then they halted, checked abruptly by the scene which greeted them.

A woman stood shrinking back against the opposite wall, smoking pistol in hand. It was the young and golden-haired woman of the coach. The bosom of her dress was torn, and blood was welling across it from a raking cut along her right shoulder. Her eyes were not upon the two intruders, but were fastened in fright and horror upon the figure of her traveling companion. This older woman lay on the floor, feebly struggling to one elbow, and one glance told Domont that she was dying, a bullet through her breast. In her hand was still gripped the knife which had slashed the younger woman.

"Hold the door, St. Martin!" said Domont in English, and stepped into the room.

As he swung the heavy door shut, the eyes of the girl lifted to him, hunted, harried.

"You are English!" she cried out. "Oh! This woman attacked me."

"Quick, quick!" The dying woman lifted her failing gaze to Domont's uniform. "Call de Lussan, quickly! She has a letter—in her bosom. A—letter. Tear it from the false wench! De Lussan! De Lussan! She has—a—a—letter for—for the—Nameless Exile."

Death rattled in the woman's throat. She fell prostrate, and so died.

Domont, stupefied by what he had just heard, no less than by the scene itself, lifted his astounded gaze to the girl. She dropped the weapon, took a step toward him.

"Help me!" she implored. "The woman was a spy. I did not know it! She was a French woman in London, asked for a place. I took her when my uncle sent for me. How was I to know? She acted as interpreter, because I speak no French. And it was the Duchess of Marlborough herself who asked me to carry the letter."

The girl had lost her head, apparently, yet Domont had a swift perception that she was not nearly so excited as she appeared. He checked her with uplifted hand, spoke in English.

"Madame, in heaven's name be coherent! You are the daughter of Baron de Karque?"

"His niece, Elsie de Bebambourg. When my father died three months ago, the baron sent for me to join him here."

"Very well. The letter, swiftly!"

Her hand flashed to her bosom as she drew back.

"No! I must either deliver or destroy it. I cannot give it to you."

"I give you my word of honor that I shall either deliver or destroy it. Swift, or we both are lost! Do not reveal to any one that I speak English. Don't trust de Lussan. What it means I don't know, but men will die outside there if you hesitate!"

Domont spoke rapidly, desperately. From the passage outside he caught angry voices, the cool danger-laugh of St. Martin, the trampling of feet. Then the sharp, imperative accents of Comte de Lussan. For an instant the girl met his gaze, then she drew a folded and sealed paper from her bosom and handed it to him.

"I trust you, sir," she said simply.

Domont seized it, thrust it from sight, and leaped to the door. This he swung open, to reveal St. Martin, knife in hand, facing the angry de Lussan.

"M. de Lussan!" he exclaimed. "Enter, I pray you, but leave your men outside. This is something very strange."

The count flung a word at his men and strode into the room. At Domont's gesture, St. Martin followed, then shut the door again. Knowing that he must keep the situation in his own control, Domont spoke rapidly.

"This woman attacked the young demoiselle, yonder—look at her throat! Fortunately, mademoiselle had a loaded pistol and used it. Before the woman died, she spoke your name, as though she knew you."

"What did she say?" De Lussan started at this information.

"Your name, and died as she uttered it. This demoiselle, I suppose, is the daughter of Baron de Karque. She speaks no French."

"The niece, the niece," said de Lussan. His dark gaze went to the girl, and he bowed, and addressed her in very fluent English. "Mademoiselle, I regret this happening. What was the cause of the attack?"

"I—she tried to rob me, I think." Desperation was in the eyes of Elise de Bebambourg as she spoke. "She seized at my dress, then tried to kill me."

"Ah! You carry something very precious?" said the count smoothly. "Jewels, perhaps?"

"No." The girl shrank a little from his hard gaze. "Nothing! She must have thought I had jewels. Oh, she was mad, mad!"

"She was not mad yesterday when I met and spoke with you at the roadside inn, and directed your driver on his road," said de Lussan thoughtfully. "Let me have your treasures, mademoiselle. I will keep them for you."

The star-glinting eyes of the girl widened in terror at his manner. Domont quietly stepped forward and touched the arm of the noble. De Lussan swung on him angrily.

"Back, Roger! There's more to this than you know."

"Indeed!" said Domont. "Perhaps you are acquainted with this dead woman, monsieur?"

"I? Not at all," denied the count, though his eyes narrowed with the words.

"I understand a little English," said Domont. "I think mademoiselle says that the woman was mad, and that she had no jewels and that you have twice given her the lie. Perhaps I am wrong. My knowledge of that language is horribly imperfect."

"You are quite correct," said de Lussan, and sneered a little.

"Then, of course," said Domont, "I have only one course open to me."

"And that course?"

Unexpectedly, Domont struck him across the face, struck him heavily and sent him reeling. Then snatched at the door and jerked it open, revealing the scene to the crowded men outside.

"You have twice given this lady the lie, monsieur. As a Norman gentleman, I take much pleasure in chastising you. Mademoiselle, will you accept my arm? Ah, she speaks no French. One of you men run for a surgeon from the hospital."

Only at this instant did Domont recollect that he had not yet despatched the town surgeon to attend the real d'Aumont. In response to his gesture, the girl stepped forward and took his arm.

De Lussan, meantime, had stood in helpless fury, yet with his brain hard at work. This meant a public admission, or else failure. Self-control mastering his whirlwind of rage and chagrin, he made swift decision and spoke.

"One moment! M. d'Aumont, as one gentleman to another, you shall answer to me for that blow. At the same time, I am a special delegate of His Majesty, and I order you to halt. You have intervened in an affair which is beyond your knowledge. If you persist, you shall suffer for it."

"For a gentleman who forgets himself, I have no regard," Domont returned coolly. "For His Majesty's lieutenant, I have every respect. And what do you wish with me, M. the delegate of the king?"

"This woman," and de Lussan pointed to the dead body, "was an agent of M. de Pontchartrain."

"Ah, a spy!" broke in Domont. "Then, monsieur, you are a self-convicted liar, for only a moment ago you told me that you did not know her."

De Lussan went livid with fury, yet kept himself in hand.

"Either this woman was mad, which I do not think," he pursued steadily, "or else she knew that Mlle. de Bebambourg was carrying some illegal message. Since the matter is now a public one through your stupidity, I must state that the woman yesterday informed me that she suspected some such thing. I believe that mademoiselle is carrying it innocently. I have no desire to affront her. I suggest, then, that in order to set these doubts at rest and perhaps to save herself from undue suspicion, she allow a woman of the Charité to search her person and bring her belongings to me for inspection.

If nothing is found amiss, it will be obvious that the unfortunate woman here was attempting robbery. With your permission, I will put my suggestion into English."

HE DID so, but before he had finished, Domont broke in.

"Perhaps, monsieur," he said cuttingly, "you would prefer to make the search yourself?"

This was almost too much, since de Lussan was a gentleman of great birth.

"Monsieur," he returned, his voice shaking with passion, "do not forget that I have the power to make arrests. I prefer to deal with you privately, but—"

The girl turned to him and spoke in English.

"M. de Lussan, I refuse to submit to such an indignity at your bidding. I am willing, however, to give you my word that I bear no letters or message whatever, except three letters to my uncle from his relatives in London. These I will give you to carry on to him and examine at leisure, if he desires that you read them. If, when he learns of this affair, he wishes to have me searched, I shall submit. But I think that you will answer to him for all this matter when he learns of it."

De Lussan met her proud and collected gaze for a long moment and bit his lip. His fury had led him too far. After all, the dead woman might have made a mistake. If the powerful de Karque took this matter to the king, not even M. de Pontchartrain could save him, for the old king was very chary of what was done in his name. This thing had been horribly bungled, and withdrawal was imperative.

"Mademoiselle, if you give me your word that you carry only the three letters to your uncle," he returned, "this affair shall be settled without further trouble to you."

"I give you my word of honor, sir," returned the girl quietly, "that I have not so much as a scrap of paper beyond those three letters."

To doubt the truth of her words was impossible. De Lussan bowed low.

"I beg you to accept my very humble apologies for the inconveniences caused you by my mistaken zeal. If I appeared to doubt your word, of your kindness, pardon me. This gentleman will escort you to another chamber. Outside there!" He spoke in French to the men at the door. "All of you, go below! One go after a surgeon."

"He is mounting the stairs now, monsieur," cried a man outside.

Elsie again took the arm of Domont, who escorted her to a door farther down the passage, where waited a white-faced woman of the inn. St. Martin followed them. Domont bowed the girl into the room, motioned the woman in, saw the surgeon enter, and closed the door after them. He caught St. Martin's arm and spoke swiftly.

"Go quickly. Find the town surgeon, not this man from the prison. Tell him about the other Roger. Get him off in haste. Then come back here and join me."

St. Martin departed hurriedly. Domont, in leisurely fashion, followed him down the now empty passage to the head of the curved, stone stairway that wound down outside into the inn courtyard. Here he found de Lussan awaiting him.

"Monsieur," said the officer abruptly, "I can not brook either your words or your blow."

"What would you?" Domont smiled at him. "Arrest me, perhaps?"

The other made a quick, passionate gesture of repressed fury.

"Let us forget my position. As a gentleman, I demand satisfaction."

"I am at your service," said Domont, then frowned. "Ah! Wait a moment. I have not yet had my morning drink. After this, I have an appointment with M. de Beauveu, whom I shall thrust through the shoulder. This finished, I shall be happy to treat you likewise."

De Lussan's teeth showed in a snarl of indescribable rage. The slight scar across his cheek glowed like a dark smear.

"Monsieur, you will not live to present your letter to the prior of the Mont."

"I'll wager you the sum of five livres on the event," said Domont reflectively. It was clear that the Sieur d'Aumont was not considered a very skillful swordsman.

"Done. I shall have the pleasure of collecting the debt from your father, monsieur."

Domont laughed, and descended the stairs. Picking his way through the throng of excited and staring cavaliers, he entered the inn and took a seat by the fireplace to await his meager breakfast and the return of St. Martin.

His thoughts dwelt with a troubled

wonder on the *imbroglio* in which he found himself now involved. He was quite confident that he could pass as his distant cousin; that was the least of his troubles, after de Lussan had been deceived in the matter. But what was this affair of the mysterious prisoner of Mont St. Michel?

Certain points were significant and clear. The entire provincial forces and a special royal deputy from Paris were afoot for the capture of an Armenian named Ketchedourian. Why? In order to keep the man's mouth shut and to prevent the delivery of a letter to the Nameless Exile. Who, then, was this Nameless Exile? A Frenchman, a noble?

Unlikely. The minister's spy at London had accompanied and had nearly trapped Elise de Bebambourg, who bore a letter to this same mysterious prisoner; a letter, this time, from the Duchess of Marlborough, the woman who was absolute ruler of England in fact if not in name, the Lady Sarah at whose beck and nod half of Europe went to peace or war. And was this golden-haired girl so innocent of the intrigue as she had seemed? Domont fancied not.

"This Nameless Exile must be no ordinary man. This affair begins to look less simple, and my head more unsafe," reflected the American. "I had to play poor de Lussan the way I did in order to save the girl. It was a close thing, too. Hm! I don't like that de Lussan. There's the devil's own mischief in the man's heart. I don't like the look of things here, either. I'm bound in honor to deliver or destroy that girl's letter. So, as I don't choose to risk carrying two of the accursed things—"

He took the letter from his pocket, made sure it was the right one and tossed it into the fire beside him.

Breakfast arrived, and on the heels of it, St. Martin. The wide-shouldered Canadian dropped to a stool and began his meal ravenously.

"Errand done," he said between bites. "The town surgeon's saddling a horse now. Two hours to low tide. Any more trouble?"

"None. I have made an appointment with de Lussan, to follow that with the other officer, de Beauveu."

"Oh! Bad medicine, comrade. I think you'd better give me the Armenian's letter."

"Watch your words, man, watch your words. Never mention again having met that man! We've stumbled into a game of state politics."

"You've stumbled into a wasp's nest."

"Not I. For the past year and more, I've done nothing but practise fence. It was our sole diversion, thanks to our Swiss jailer, an old master of arms who loved extra fees. He tells me I am one of the best swordsmen in France, and I believe him."

"Faith of a Mohawk! You are confident in your ability."

"Does it pay to underestimate one's self? Now listen—" Domont leaned over and tapped the other's knee. "All this business looks perilous to me. I strongly advise you to post on to St. Malo and await me there, and let me finish this errand alone."

"Bah! I'm not the man to desert you," grunted the Canadian. "If you take the scalp of this de Lussan, he may arrest you on the spot."

"No. He's above that. At all events, take this ring." Domont slipped the Armenian's diamond from his finger and handed it to the other man. "You'd better keep it in case of necessity. Carry it in that firebag of yours for the sake of safety."

Ten minutes afterward the two men from the western world reentered the thronged courtyard. To one side, de Lussan stood talking with the two officers, and he flung a black look at Domont.

"There is an excellent spot for our purpose," he said, "behind the Charité. Does it suit you, M. d'Aumont?"

"I am entirely at your service," said Domont carelessly. "St. Martin, will you oblige me by asking that prison surgeon to attend us? Tell him that M. de Beauveu's right arm will require a sling, and that M. de Lussan will require a bandage for his left arm. A slight thrust will not incapacitate him for any length of time."

De Beauveu's second laughed a little.

"I hope you have improved in fence, M. d'Aumont, since your recent lucky affair behind the Palais Royal!"

Domont, assuming the swiftly intolerant mien of his cousin, lightly struck the officer across the cheek.

"For that," he exclaimed, "I shall have the pleasure of showing you that the aforesaid affair did not depend on luck, after I have finished with M. de Lussan. You shall have it directly through the shoulder also, my dear sir, in order to keep M. de Beauveu company."

The other flushed, bowed and turned away.

Fifteen minutes later, the five men and the prison surgeon were standing in a little glade behind the prison and hospital buildings. The first "*en garde!*" sounded. It was exactly two minutes later that de Beauveu cursed and dropped his sword, with a thrust neatly through the right shoulder.

"Drunken man's luck," murmured de Lussan, advancing into the open with bared blade.

"Not at all," and Domont smiled. "*En garde, monsieur!* There is no necessity of waiting, I assure you. I do not need to rest."

The steel clashed. De Lussan's face passed from a confident sneer to swift incredulity, then to amazed desperation, and finally set in swift fury. It was slightly less than four minutes when the sword of Domont passed through his left arm above the elbow. He cried out fiercely that they should continue, and the seconds hesitated.

"Not at all. I have no desire to kill M. de Lussan," said Domont. "Besides, there is another gentleman awaiting his turn."

The other officer, serving as de Lussan's second, threw off his coat and advanced. He wielded his blade exactly one minute and a half, then staggered backward with a splotch of red growing on his shoulder.

"So." Domont sheathed his sword and took his coat from St. Martin. "When I have collected our wager, M. de Lussan, I shall ride on. I have an important letter to deliver, and I think the tide is rapidly clearing the sands."

Just how important that letter was, Domont could not guess.

CHAPTER IV

THE EFFECT OF A LETTER DEPENDS ON THE SIGNATURE

WHEN the party returned to the inn and it appeared that de Lussan and the two officers were all wounded while the supposed d'Aumont was unscratched, the cavaliers of the *maré-chaussée* displayed great interest in the affair, many of them congratulating the Norman very heartily. Domont concluded that he was altogether too well known to remain here safely, so he ordered the horses saddled. He had already ascertained from the surgeon that Mlle. de Bebambourg was only slightly injured.

Five minutes afterward he and St. Martin mounted and rode forth. It was not yet ebb tide, but the road was marked by a straggling procession setting forth toward the island—country folk with fuel and provisions, itinerant merchants and peddlers, a score of lusty peasants from the villages which the abbey held in fief, going to relieve their fellows and serve as garrison. Mont St. Michel, an impregnable fortress often besieged but never captured, no longer had any complement of soldiers, save a few in ill health, sent here for treatment.

The two friends rode on in silence, passing the unhurried groups of peasants and the creaking carts. They came at length to the wet and glistening stretches of sand which already lay bare for miles around and rode on to the verge of the slowly retreating water. There they drew rein and dismounted, indescribably impressed by the splendor and unreality of that pinnacled rock which now stood forth clear-cut against the sky and sea. Domont, who had not dared to use his pipe at the inn, filled and lighted it, and St. Martin followed suit.

"Faith of a Mohawk!" exclaimed the Canadian, who could not stare enough. "No wonder folk call it The Marvel. Was it built by men, indeed?"

Domont did not respond. He shared the awed feeling of his companion, and felt that words were futile. Forth from the sea jutted that mighty mass of rock, girdled about the whole shore-line on this side by massive walls, bastions and towers. From these the sheer precipice ran upward unbroken, as it seemed, to the mounting towers and pinnacles of the abbey, whose long buttresses that ran clear down to the solid rock below heightened the impression of a fairy castle of old romance.

"The effect of perpendicular lines," observed Domont presently, "is stupendous!"

"So is the effect of horizontal thrusts." St. Martin turned to him with a slow chuckle. "I'll never forget de Lussan's face when he saw you attending so neatly to de Beauveu! Roger, you have made a mistake. You should have killed that accursed de Lussan."

"And then be jailed for killing the king's deputy? Nonsense. We're well out of a bad matter, St. Martin! Now let's use our caution. You had best not appear too friendly with me, since there's no telling what lies ahead of us here. It may require several days to deliver the letter in my pocket. I understand there is no lack of inns in the town below the abbey. Whether we'll stop there or will find guest-quarters in the abbey itself, remains to be seen. Delivery of d'Aumont's letter may get me an invitation to spend some time in the place, and so much the better. Between us we must find some means of reaching that mysterious prisoner."

"Hm! I don't like the idea of shutting myself up in that place." St. Martin eyed the mount with narrowed gaze. "It's all very grand from a distance, but I dislike walls. Well, we might be walking on and following the tide."

"No. Make haste slowly." Domont glanced back to the straggling line of country folk. "Let those people show us the road. Much of the sand around here, I understand, will suck down a man beyond rescue."

"Ah!" St. Martin stood listening. "Bells. Hark to them! Bells of fairy land!"

So it seemed, indeed, as a long, sweet chime drifted faintly on the breeze from the distant mount, and then was silent. The sense of reality was increased enormously. Just as that wondrous abbey was isolated and cut off from the mainland, so it seemed cut off from all the things of actual life.

"And now," observed St. Martin in a low voice, "the devil in person, by his looks!"

Domont turned. One of the approaching procession had left the other folks and was walking rapidly toward the two friends. He was a queer creature in all conscience—a little man with one shoulder higher than the other, shambling gait that none the less covered ground remarkably fast, huge flapping ears which amounted to a positive deformity, and rusty black garb carrying a hint of the cassock. Domont thought he had seen this odd creature at the inn, but was not at all certain.

Coming to them, the misshapen little man doffed his black hat with a humble air, and upon Domont fastened two bright and sparkling eyes which were full of a lively craft and a livelier intelligence.

"Your pardon, M. d'Aumont!" he said. His voice was surprizingly low, musical, rich. "I am called the Mole of the Mont. I am the librarian yonder, scrivener and servant of Dom Julien, our superior. Word came to me that you bear a letter for the prior. If you will permit me to guide you across the sands, it will be great honor."

"Certainly," said Domont, and indicated his comrade. "Perhaps you can tell us something of which we were debating. This gentleman is from Canada, and is on his way to St. Malo. He wishes to visit the Mont. I suppose there is an inn at which he can stop?"

The Mole broke into laughter, quickly checked.

"Surely, M. d'Aumont, you forget the pilgrimages? The whole town is an inn! However, I think that Dom Julien will receive this pilgrim from Canada with keen delight, and will lodge him in the guest chambers of the abbey. He is evidently a great gentleman."

Domont bit his lip, perceiving that he had made a bad error.

Now the three started forward. Domont paused an instant to knock out his pipe so that St. Martin took the lead with his horse. The hand of the Mole fell upon Domont's wrist, and as the American met those keen, sparkling, brown eyes, the deformed scrivener made a silent gesture, indicating that St. Martin was to be allowed to get well ahead. Domont nodded and slackened pace, falling behind out of earshot.

"Have you forgot, monsieur," asked the Mole in a low voice, "about that peasant girl who was hanged for poaching on the preserves of the abbey lands?"

Domont looked at the man.

"Certainly not," he ventured, then saw the wide, thin lips of the Mole curve in a sardonic smile.

Another error or a trap?

"I had not heard of the affair before," said the Mole, and chuckled. "Good player, good player! I like you, monsieur. Now see how swiftly the Mole can burrow! I heard of that meeting back there behind the Charité. In fact, I was hidden among the trees and witnessed it. M. d'Aumont has become a remarkable swordsman in the space of a very short while, eh? Then, he has forgotten a fact of which all the world knows—the pilgrimages and the inns at the Mont, which are famous. Again, he has suddenly acquired the abominable habit of using tobacco in a pipe and sucking the smoke. What is more to the point, he has also acquired a new and much more manly look about the eyes."

"Enough," said Domont quietly. He understood perfectly that his imposture had been pierced by the keen brown eyes of this deformed man, and that any protest or evasion was absolutely useless. "What of it?"

"What of it? Why, I suppose money in your pocket and Rodomont at liberty, eh?"

Domont did not entirely understand the drift of this.

"Something like that," he assented vaguely, and the Mole chuckled in bubbling glee.

An odd man, this Mole.

"Monsieur, fear me not!" he exclaimed, catching at Domont's arm. "Me, I like to play a game, and I like you. Trust me and I'm your man. Also, I have heard gossip of what took place in the upper chambers of the inn behind there, and I can make a shrewd guess at a thing or two. Perhaps it was not for the sake of Rodomont at all, but for the sake of a certain demoiselle with fine yellow hair like golden flax, that you came hither in the place of Rodomont, eh?"

In sudden consternation, Domont inwardly cursed the fellow's penetration. Then he met those sparkling brown eyes, and a revulsion of feeling swept over him and a laugh sprang to his lips. The straight, direct gaze of those eyes held a warm friendliness that he could not mistake.

"My faith, Mole, you are well named!" he exclaimed whimsically. "Good, I shall trust you as you ask. My name is Roger Domont. My grandfather went to the New World years ago from these very shores, and the Sieur d'Aumont is a distant relative."

"I remember, I remember!"

As the Mole cried out, he gave a grotesque caper, and his musical voice rang shrill with excitement. Turning to look at them, St. Martin caught a gesture from Domont, and went on again.

"Aye, I have read about it in the chronicles. Ha! A good name, a good game! Go on, then. What next?"

Under the avid curiosity of those peering eyes, Domont resolved to twist the tale to serve his purpose, avoiding all mention of the Armenian's letter.

"Why, I met this Canadian gentleman on the road hither, and I met also the niece of Baron de Karque and I met the Sieur d'Aumont, my Mole, you have made a shrewd guess. I'll admit to you that I was drawn into the matter from a desire to, shall we say, see more of a certain person. On the other hand, I could also do my cousin a service, and this is the way it fell out."

He proceeded to relate his meeting with d'Aumont at the tavern of the Rock That Boils, and what had taken place there. But at the finish he was interrupted suddenly.

TO HIS utter astonishment the Mole, who had been softly chuckling to himself, now stared hard at him for a long moment and then burst into a fit of wild laughter that was absolutely beyond control. His shrill mirth passed into paroxysms of shrieking. Tears flowed down his cheeks; he doubled up and sat on the sand, still roaring forth his repeated outbursts of merriment, hands holding his sides. The file of country folk regarded the scene in ox-eyed wonder. St. Martin turned and stared at them, puzzled, holding the reins of his horse, but did not rejoin them. In vain did Domont demand some explanation of the joke. His angry words only increased the frenzied mirth of the Mole until at last the creature had fairly laughed himself into exhaustion.

"St. Michel have mercy on me!" he gasped at length, dragging himself erect. "So you don't know, you don't know what's in the letter to the prior, eh?"

"And how the —— do you know what's in it?" exclaimed Domont angrily.

The Mole broke into more laughter, but conquered it.

"I don't. I was thinking of something else, monsieur," he answered, and though the words formed a palpable lie, Domont did not press him. "Come, let us be going on! Forgive my laughter, monsieur. It was not at you, I assure you."

"I think you are a liar," said Domont coolly.

"Of course. All men are liars," was the imperturbable response. "The pot calls the kettle black, eh? Ho, ho! Come, we shall be friends, I perceive. Onward, then! Have no fear, monsieur. There is no other person who can pry beneath the surface of your imposition. Only the Mole can do that. I am glad you are coming to this accursed place."

"Eh? You speak thus of a sacred shrine?" said Domont, astonished anew.

"Oh, —— take the sacred fiddlestick!" The Mole grimaced, and then chuckled as he met Domont's eye. "Never mind, you understand me. I see in your face that you are a man after my own heart. You and I shall crack many a stolen bottle with none of the sanctimonious brethren at hand to bother us. And I fancy the look of that wide-shouldered Canadian, yonder. He, too, is a man! I'd like rarely to see him at the grapple with fat brother Simon, though there's more muscle in Simon's fat than most people would believe."

"Of what order is the prior?" asked Domont.

At this, the Mole gave him a long look, and then whistled.

"Sieur d'Aumont, your knowledge assuredly needs great extension! The Mont has always belonged to the Benedictines, of course. Now it's the property of the reformed order, the congregation of St. Maur. Fuss and feathers! These Mauristes are always dragging me away from my books to hear their prayers and whining of psalms and whatnot, and to grind paint for their illuminations, and whiten vellum and parchment for their books. Br-r-r! *Domine, non sum dignus!* And did you hear that fool of a Brother Gabriel ring the bells just now?"

"Aye," said Domont, regarding his singular companion with astonishment, yet with a certain understanding. "They sounded like fairy bells."

The Mole spat a curse, and then his face lighted up with strange tenderness.

"Ah, I love to play the bells. They are mine, for I have arranged them in chimes, and no one can play them like I can! They sing to me, those bells. There is the big bass fog-bell that is rung when pilgrims are coming across the sands, for the fog comes suddenly, and one caught in it is often lost forever. Then there are Benedict and Catherine, made in the almonry furnace seventy years ago, and the others, all twelve of them. They come from a prince here, a cardinal there, a noble pilgrim yonder. They are silvery-tongued, beautiful, and when I make them into music they sing a rarer mass to God than all the whining brethren in the abbey church with the mass on their lips and petty strife and jealousy in their hearts!"

Odd confidences, for this abbey servant to bestow upon a stranger! Some men might hold that much reading had driven this Mole mad. None the less, Domont realized that he was astoundingly sane, living much within himself or perhaps far within a world which he had created for himself to replace another and more harshly grim world outside. And realizing, he felt sudden pity for the other.

"You," said Domont, though more to himself than to the creature who walked along at his side, "should go away to the far north land, the land of ice beyond the Bay of Hudson, where eternal fires streak the heavens and make glories in the ice, where a man lives to his own mind and not to the minds of little men around him! Or out into the wilderness of the western lands, where no white man has been. After all, there is a place for every one in this world, if it could be found."

"Ah, if it could be found!" The Mole turned and gave him one glance, and Domont saw a sparkle of sudden tears in the great brown eyes, and the low musical voice was mournful as the voice of breaking waves along a night-shore. "If it could be found—yes. There's the tragedy of it for poor moles like me! Aye, it is seldom found, and men are bitter cruel at heart. And sometimes when the gulls wheel about the Mont they squawk to me of far lands and peace beyond the horizon yonder. But I, I have only to dream and read and plot and die."

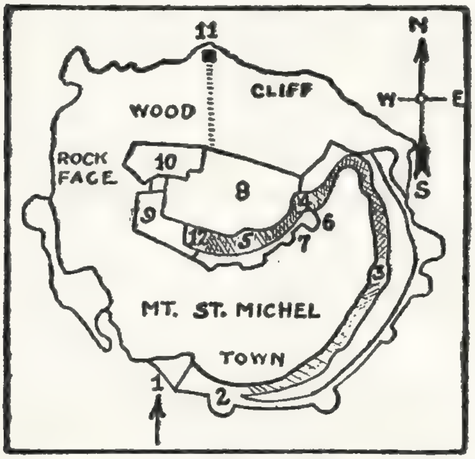
Now there was a little silence between them, for Domont was startled by what had just been said, and did not know well how to make answer to this revelation. But presently the Mole touched his hand, lightly, affectionately, with a swift change of mood.

"My friend, my friend, you understand! Now I am more glad than ever that you are coming to the Mont. There are no secrets for me in that place of secrets. Who reads the ancient books now, except the Mole? These Mauristes are too busy making other books. Who knows the secrets of that old Carolingian builder except the Mole? No one. Who knows the hidden things that Sollier and Pierre le Roy did, while building their parts of The Marvel? Only the Mole, the little blind despised Mole! My friend, the Mole turns up some strange things in that old library, and goes strange ways underground where no man has walked these many years. Well, we shall see!"

A harsh, ironical laugh broke from him.

"You follow a pretty face, and the Mole follows his nose, and if he did not serve the good fathers, he would be burned for a wizard at Avranches—because he is saner than most men. Accept or be burned! Me, I do not accept. Instead, I serve. Serve, little parrot, like the gay bird that sits and chatters before the hostelry of the Licorne. Serve, parrot, and eat your crumbs and mumble your words over and over, *Domine, non sum dignus, non sum dignus, non sum dignus*."

Ironical, bitter, scornful, the words of the strange creature were instinct with a frightful mockery. Domont looked down at the little man, with his askew shoulders, flapping ears, large unnatural face, feeling a great pity for the poor creature and, singularly enough, a growing respect.



1. BARBICAN AND SOUTH GATE. 2. KING'S GATE AND TOWER. 3. STREET LEADING TO ABBEY. 4. CHATELET. 5. GREAT INNER DEGREE. 6. PERRINE TOWER. 7. ABBATIAL BUILDINGS. 8. CHURCH. 9. WEST PLATFORM. 10. GARDEN. 11. FOUNT OF ST. AUBERT. 12. SOUTH PLATFORM.

It was true enough that out in the world of men this Mole would be in rare peril, since a grotesque exterior such as his would infallibly become a prey to hunters of heresy and warlocks. The preternaturally keen and alert brain in that poor body had found him a sure and certain refuge. And, if he served indeed, there was a breath of peril in that service to those who sat above him.

"St. Martin!" called Domont. "Join us."

The Canadian turned, drew his horse in, and waited; he had mounted, and sat in the saddle gazing down at them. Domont touched the arm of the Mole.

"I have not been entirely frank with you," he stated quietly. "This seigneur from Canada is my friend and in my secrets. St. Martin, I adjure you not to look at the body of this man, but look into his brain and you will find there a rare spirit at which few would ever guess. I commend him to your friendship."

Now St. Martin regarded the Mole full in the face, and instinctively crossed himself. But, as though to make amends for this significant gesture, he smiled and held down his hand to the other.

"Greetings, comrade!" he said. "Rodomont gives you road belts. I welcome you."

The Mole was far from understanding this Indian jargon of belts, but he was swift to comprehend the spirit behind the words, and his eyes were eloquent.

"The tide ebbs, friends," he said simply. "Let us go on."

The three moved forward, Domont remaining afoot and leading his horse.

Now, as they drew closer across those shining sands, the wonder of the place grew ever upon Domont and held him silent. The lower battlements that ringed the island shore were stout and imposing enough, but from these the town ran upward, ran steeply up to the Marvel itself, a creation whose fairylike aspect did not die away, but grew more pronounced upon closer view. Gray and ancient and massive were those stones; up and up shot the great towers, the high walls, the pinnacles of granite, all of them surrounded by a lacework of carving, a perfection of detail almost beyond comprehension; and, at the height, all this culminated in the cupola of the bell tower.

St. Martin glanced behind them, and then uttered a low word of warning. Domont turned to see the coach of Elise de Bebambourg rolling rapidly toward them. Behind it ran along the straggling procession of carts and country folk, and behind these again, a mass of horsemen, these last, no doubt, de Lussan and his men. The events at the inn had made Domont give up his scheme of reaching the Mont in company with the girl. Now he saw her leaning from the coach window and he saluted her gravely. At a word from her, the coach slowed and halted.

"I have not thanked you," she said in English, her clear blue eyes meeting his gaze, "but believe me, I am not ungrateful. I shall hope to see you soon."

"And I," said Domont, "I, also, mademoiselle, shall hope."

A touch of color leaped into her cheeks. Then the coach was rolling forward again.

The voice of the Mole sounded with droll emphasis.

"A miracle has happened, a miracle! M. d'Aumont has learned to speak English!"

At this remark, St. Martin looked around with a startled air, until he caught the eye of Domont, who laughed.

"He knows everything, St. Martin. Have no fear! Or," he added in English, "if not everything, then everything except our prime errand."

The Mole gave him a sharp glance, and chuckled.

"I do not know English," he said quizzically, "but I can read faces, my friend. So you do not trust me completely? Well, small blame to you. These days, our Mont St. Michel is a seat perilous, and holds dark secrets."

Domont spoke frankly.

"There is one thing I have not told you and shall not tell you yet awhile, friend Mole. It is not my secret to tell."

"Fair enough," and the Mole nodded approvingly. "But now mount, my friend, mount! Do not forget that you are great gentlemen, and that I am only a Mole, a humble servitor. I do not want that fat Brother Simon asking questions."

Domont nodded and swung up into the saddle.

TIME had passed during their gradual approach, so that now the waters had withdrawn almost entirely from about the Mont. The Mole led them straight to the south gate, where the coach was now standing, being unladen. Elise de Bebambourg had disappeared. As they came close to the gateway, the coach turned and started back for Pontorson.

"We have no quarters for your horses here," said the Mole. "Two of the returning villagers will be glad to ride them back, and they'll be cared for. Follow me, now."

About the gateway were grouped a number of armed peasants, and the half-dozen invalided soldiers who had quarters on the Mont. The two visitors were passed without more than formal questions. But Domont noted that a man preceded them with word of their errand.

Now, once inside the barbican, they were fronted by the massive Boulevard Gate, whose portcullis was down. A postern was open, however, and through this they advanced into a narrow street flanked on either side by taverns. A hundred yards ahead of them rose a moated battlement, tower-flanked, the King's Gate, this, and to it the Mole pointed.

"Our lord abbot," he observed, "being a nobleman and a soldier and not a priest, has moved out of the abbatial chambers, and now occupies those quarters over the gate and in the tower, with his charming niece. To tell the truth, I think he quarreled with Dom Nicolas, for the garden and certain other portions of the Marvel are cloistered, and the honest baron does not understand why the rule against women should apply to the niece of the lord abbot, eh! It's a queer world."

Passing the King's Gate by another postern, they were at last in the cobble-stoned and extremely steep street that led up to the abbey. Here too were taverns. As the Mole said, the entire town was a trap for pilgrims, and the inn-keepers did a thriving business in votive offerings as well as in chambers.

"This is a —— of a place to get out of!" said St. Martin, staring.

"So the king thinks," and the Mole chuckled. "There at the bend to the left, is the house Bertrand du Guesclin built for his lady. If your baggage is not lost, it will be after us presently. Indeed, I spoke about it at the gate. Here is our host of the Unicorn. Get past him if you can, for he has a keen eye for pilgrims of quality!"

The Licorne Inn spanned the narrow way ahead of them, with the aproned host standing in the doorway. He was already bawling at them, loud-mouthed.

"Excellent chambers, good sire! If you wish votive hearts, a blessed rosary with the beads of solid amber, a reliquary containing the little finger of St. Michel, or other objects of piety, I pray you reserve your patronage for me."

They passed on, beneath the ægis of the little Mole, and wound up the toiling street. With pauses on the landings, they climbed the flights of ascending stairs and so came at last to that long flight which led to the gate house or Chatelet, with all the vast buildings of the abbey yet towering high above. Here the Mole presented their names and errands to the guard, styling St. Martin a pilgrim.

Another climb followed after passing the gate, and Domont found himself in the guard room, a great hall thronged by peasant guards who were anxiously awaiting their relief. Here the two friends exchanged a handgrip of farewell, and St. Martin was conducted on to the church and guest chambers above. Domont accompanied the Mole out to the Great Inner Degree, a seemingly endless stairway, a great climbing and winding stair walled on one side by the church, on the other by the abbatial buildings, spanned here by a massive arch with portcullis, there by a bridge. Then, weary and aching of leg, the American followed his guide through a small doorway, up more stairs and so into a large ante-chamber where a monk sat diligently writing. The Mole spoke briefly with this monk and turned.

"Dom Julien will receive you in a moment, M. d'Aumont. He is already advised of your arrival."

With this, the Mole departed, giving Domont one look significant of caution and hidden mirth, a singularly incomprehensible look. Domont thankfully dropped into a seat, but it was only a moment or two when a monk appeared and silently beckoned him. He followed into an adjoining chamber and found himself alone with Dom Julien Doyte, prior and ruler of Mont St. Michel.

A singularly powerful man was this Dom Julien, his intellectual features darkly framed in his severe monastic habit. They were pleasant features, yet those of a commander, the eyes authoritative, heavy-lidded, the nostrils and lower face thinly ascetic. A smile sat in the dark eyes as Domont approached and bowed respectfully.

"I am glad to make your acquaintance, my son, for I knew your father long ago," said the prior. "Peace be with you! Is it true that you have brought me a letter?"

"Here is the letter, father," said Domont guardedly.

The prior took the sealed paper that he extended, examined and broke the seal, then opened the letter. He nodded thoughtfully and glanced up.

"It is my duty to read this to you, M. d'Aumont."

"Your duty?" exclaimed the surprized Domont. "But, I assure you—"

"You may be acquainted with its nature already, yet my orders are very strict," broke in the other, with an air of gentle regret. Somewhat alarmed and much puzzled, Domont made no further protest. Holding the letter to the light of the high window, the prior proceeded to read it aloud:

"DE PAR LE ROY

"Cher et bien âmé, nous vous mandons et ordonnons de recevoir dans votre maison le Sieur Roger d'Aumont et de l'y garder jusqu'à nouvel ordre de notre part, au moyen de la pension qui vous sera payée solidairement par la famille. Si n'y faites faute, car tel est notre plaisir.

Donné à Versailles, le 21 Juin, 1707.
Signé: Louis
Contresigné: Pontchartrain." *

"IN THE KING'S NAME

"Dear and well beloved, we order and command that you receive in your abode Sieur Roger d'Aumont, and keep him there until new orders come from us; at the charges of the pension which will be paid on his behalf by the family. Let no error be made, for such is our pleasure.

Given at Versailles, June 21, 1707
Signed: Louis
Countersigned: Pontchartrain"

The frightful significance of this letter did not reach Domont for a long moment, until he found the prior regarding him, a little sadly.

"My dear M. d'Aumont, I greatly regret that you have come hither bearing a *lettre de cachet*. At the same time, you shall have no cause to complain of our hospitality. You are not a prisoner, but an exile."

A *lettre de cachet!* Domont caught his breath, and did not even hear the admonition that followed—the gentle, kindly lecture upon his supposed offenses.

He knew now why the Mole had laughed.

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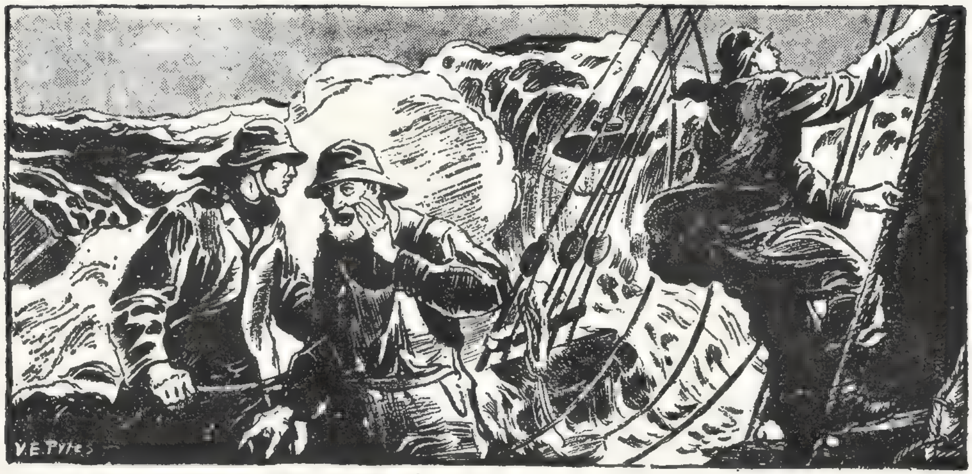
* The French version is here given as a curiosity, for it will not readily be found elsewhere.

TO BE CONTINUED



KELP by Captain Dingle

Author of "Ambition A. B.," "Pig," etc.

"I don' keer where they bury me—
Swing them gates ajar!
On th' lan' or in the sea-hea—
Oh, swing them gates ajar!
Swing them open, angels! Oh, swing them wide an' far;
Th' bells do ring, th' angels sing, ho—
Swing them gates ajar!"

"IF YOU don't clap hatches on that yapper o' yourn, young feller, you an' me's goin' to the floor!"

The forecastle dripped cold drops from the beams; the steel sides sweated; the floor glistened with swirling water, in which floated boots, matches, and all manner of wreckage of harassed men. Seas crashed on the deck overhead; they hammered at the stout steel plates of the bows. The steel door was shut, but every now and then a jet of water squirted between it and the sill, when heavier thunder outside heralded another boarding sea. Men lay in their wet bunks, full-clad in boots and oilskins, fagged out, sore, and resentful. The youth who dared to sing was turning over the bread barge in hope of finding a bit of hardtack not too sodden and salty to eat. He stopped singing at the savage warning, but went on rummaging. From the bunk nearest to him an old, patient tolerant voice chided him gently:

"That's a —— of a ditty to sing, 'Skimps!' If you got to yawp at all the hooraw like this here, sing some'at a bit more cheerful. Don' keer where they buries ye! Ugh!"

"He'll be buried wi' no chance to care if he carries on!" growled the seaman who had uttered the warning. "Sech a —— song!"

Skimps found a bit of pantile, and his teeth were too busy for his tongue to sing. He was young in the sea-going game, and a bit nervous, for the going was rough just then; he had to do something to keep his courage from utterly oozing. Even Old Sharley, who had befriended him all the voyage, had his own troubles lately, for the *Gauntlet* had been nigh forty days battling her westward way around old Cape Stiff.

Woo-ooh, woo-ooh! A shuddery groan filtered through all the racket of boarding seas and straining structure.

"Fog again!" muttered Old Sharley.

" 'Nother watch below gorn to ——!" whined a pessimist in the wettest bunk in the forecastle.

"Wait 'till yer called, Bad Luck!" growled Swansea, who had shut off Skimps' song. "Allus a-weepin'!"

The door was flung open, and a swirl of wet fog came in like a shroud, in the midst of which was the boatswain, roaring like the Bull of Barney:

"All hands! Shake a leg, here! Don't stop for clothes, me sons. Stations t' tack ship! Get a move on. We're among th' ice!"

"Wot'd I tell yer?" whimpered Bad Luck, frantically tugging to get a wet boot on over a wet sock.

The boatswain leaped upon him, bidding him get out unless he wanted to drown.

"Never mind th' boots, son," said Old Sharley, clapping the man on the shoulder. "Skimps says he don't keer where they buries him, but you wants a chance to swim for yer life, don't you? Come on, lads. Shake 'em up. Bed's no place wi' fog and ice to loo'ard."

Out in the dank fog, wind-driven and tangible, chilled and aching seamen waited for the order to raise tacks and sheets. Uneasy mates headed their watches. Invisible, on the poop, the captain listened through the megaphone, while waiting for his ship to come to the wind. She was sluggish. The wind had lost weight.

"I can 'ear breakers!" cried Bad Luck.

The mate struck him on the mouth, cursing him for a Jonah.

Woo-ooh, woo-ooh! blared the fog-horn.

Woo-ooh, woo-ooh! came back out of the murk. There came, too, the sullen wash of seas about some solider thing.

"Ship on th' lee-bow!" bawled Swansea.

"It's breakers!" whimpered Bad Luck, daring another blow.

"That's a echo off of ice," muttered Old Sharley.

The ship's headsails began to shake, the bows lifted to the swell.

"Raise tacks and sheets!" bellowed Captain Tort, and men tramped and cursed over hard-hitched ropes.

The great foreyards with their wet, heavy canvas came aback as the wind passed the bow, and the ship trembled under the thrashing of gear.

"Mains'l haul!" the order pealed out, and braces were hauled to a runaway, swinging the mainyards around hard on the backstays to the other tack.

"Now the fore! Shift over head sheets, bosun!" shouted the mate, leading his men to the fore braces.

Woo-ooh! groaned the fog-horn, once now, for the tack had been changed.

A sullen sea rose above the rail and dropped aboard, knocking men down at the braces.

Woo-ooh! the echo came back, derisively, as much as to say, "I'll get you yet!" And through a flurry hole in the dripping mist abeam, passing astern with sickening slowness, the bleak, cold face of a mountain of ice breathed menace upon the ship. Captain Tort watched it pass astern in frozen fascination. Men stared at it, speechlessly.

Woo-ooh! the fog-horn moaned. The ice gave back no answer.

"—— lummee! That wos close!" gasped young Skimps.

"That'll do the watch," said the mate. "Make up the gear, the rest o' you."

"Did yer see 'im 'it me in the kisser? Did yer?" Bad Luck demanded of Skimps in the forecastle.

Skimps was already into the bread barge again. He was young, healthy, and permanently hungry.

"Swing them open, angels, Oh swing them wide an' far;
Th' bells do ring, th' angels sing, oh—
Swing them gates ajar!"

Skimps sang softly, for he had not forgotten the warning of Swansea. Bad Luck cursed him, and took his tale of woe over to Swansea.

"Why wouldn't 'e 'it you in th' mug?" demanded Swansea fiercely. "Yer a —— Jonah, any'ow. You an' that singin' stiff of a Skimps! Argghl!"

"You look out, Swansea, look out!" muttered Bad Luck, slinking along to his miserable bunk.

Swansea half leaped from his own bunk.

"Wot's 'e say? Wot? Look out? Me?"

Old Sharley hastily intercepted the furious seaman.

"Don't mind him, Swansea. Don't mind th' lad. He ain't a sailorman like you. Th' lad's nervous, an' wore out. He don't mean nothing."

Swansea crawled back into his sodden blankets, muttering:

"You as well, for two pins, Old Sharley! Mind yer eye, old man!"

"Shut yer —— row an' let a bloke catch th' bird, can't yer?" grumbled a weary sailor, and the forecastle fell silent, except for the diminishing thunder of the sea.

Fog thickened with the lessening of the wind, but the seas ran heavy and steep. On the *Gauntlet's* open poop Captain Tort shivered under heavy woolen clothes and oilskins; the mate shivered beside him; the sailor at the wheel had passed the shivering point, and stood there numbed and blue. A man stood at each corner of the poop rail, striving with every faculty to pierce the gloom and the elemental thrumming for sound or glimpse. The ship moved sluggishly, deep-laden with coal. In the skipper's nervous pacing across the deck, he passed from time to time across the thin thread of light issuing through the chartroom curtains; and his face was flabby and gray. His lips curled upward at the corners, as if he smiled; but there was no smile in his eyes—they were cold and small, like a snake's. A boy crept shivering from the lee of the charthouse and struck the bell. Captain Tort jumped, as if the sound were a shot. He started again when the big forecastle bell clanged out in answer—one-two—one-two! But the upward curl to his lips remained frozen on his face. He intercepted the shivering boy, and seized him by the ear, shaking him cruelly.

"Tell me the next time you go to strike the bell, boy!" he snarled.

The lad shot a terrific look up at the smiling lips, bewildered.

"Yes, sir!" he gasped, and scurried back to shelter.

"The Old Man's got 'em again," said the mate to his junior, at the midnight relief of the watch.

"He's had 'em all the voyage!" returned the second mate tersely.

* * *

IN THE early hours of the graveyard watch—the "gravy-eye" of the forecastle—Bad Luck, on the lookout forward, turned aft and howled in panic:

"Breakers ahead! Breakers ahead!"

Nobody took any notice. Bad Luck was scared. The lookout on the poop thought he heard something out there in the dripping murk. He wanted to shout, but was afraid of being classed with Bad Luck. The helmsman heard it. He muttered something when the officer of the watch went to peer into the binnacle. Then the skipper heard it.

"What's that? Hear it?" he cried irritably.

In an instant the ship struck something hard and solid, shivering to her keel frames. Her tall masts sprung and whipped like canes; the rigging twanged, the sails emptied themselves of wind with a hollow boom and mighty crash.

"Down helm! Down hellum!" bellowed Captain Tort madly. "Stand by 'bout ship! Stations, Mister! —— you, at the wheel there! Down with it!"

Men rushed out of their hiding places. The ship scraped over the rock she had struck, reeling giddily, and plunged on again, swinging on her keel so slowly she almost seemed dead.

"Let-fly those head-sheets! My lord! Are you going to see me lose my ship?" wailed the skipper.

The ship struck again, less violently than before. The skipper wrung his hands, pacing the poop like a caged animal; but as he crossed and recrossed the string of light from the chart room, his face still wore that frozen smile. The shivering boy scurried past him fearfully.

The *Gauntlet* came about, slowly, with much shrill crying-out at sheets and braces, for the men had been badly shaken. But come about she did, without another jar, and stood seaward once more into the blind fog, with the plain, ominous thunder of surf on an iron coast mocking them from astern.

Woo-ooh, woo-ooh! blared the fog-horn, worked frenziedly by Bad Luck.

You-you! the breakers roared in the landward darkness.

"Send that blind lookout aft to me!" the skipper ordered, as the watch was dismissed again.

Long hours after he had been turned in, Old Sharley was aroused by a shower of icy drops in his face, and the sound of weeping in his ear. He thrust out his head, and there was Bad Luck, cursing horribly, crying too, and palpably on the edge of desperation.

"Wot's up, sonny?" Sharley asked quietly.

Old Sharley's gentle voice usually soothed. Now Bad Luck swung around upon him in passion. Old Sharley saw that the man was cruelly cut and bruised about the face; ice clung to his hair, and white rime to his meager clothes.

" 'E beat me, crool!" Bad Luck raved. "Beat me wiv 'is fistes, becos 'e said I didn't sing out breakers a'ead! I sung out, —— blimee I did, and nobody never give me a rumble. Wait. Jus' wait. That —— mate, too. Ho, jus' you wait an'—"

"I'll wait you, if you don't stow yer row!" swore Swansea sleepily.

Bad Luck defied him.

"You go to ——, see, Swansea? Wot do I care for you, or a 'undred like you! Wot 'ave I been beat up for, an' made to stand —— nigh all my watch below, up there on lookout? You can't do anyfink to me.

—— lummee! Git up an' try yer 'and! Nobody can't 'urt me no more. Come on, git up an' show me!"

The lad was hysterical with pain, cold, sense of wrong. Even Swansea sensed that, and let the challenge pass. Old Sharley got out of his bunk, and laid a kindly hand on Bad Luck's shoulder.

"Never mind, me son. We all has to go through it some time or other. The Old Man's worried about his ship. He'll be sorry when the weather clears. Don't hold a grudge agin yer officers. 'T ain't 'ealthy."

" 'Ealthy? Wot do I care about me 'ealth? Sorry? Like —— 'e 'll be sorry, and 'im larfin fit to bust all the time he wos 'ammerin' me! An' wot did th' mate 'it me in the kisser for? Wot am I, any'ow? Jus' wait. They can't pick on me for nothink. I'll be even wiv 'em."

Twice the fog rolled away, and twice rolled back again, doubly dense. Seven seaward tacks the *Gauntlet* made, only to encounter what seemed to be illimitable ice. Seven landward boards she made, until the sullen boom of breakers on an iron coast sent her about with clanging clearance ports and crashing gear.

"Nothink but leefore brace, mains'l haul, an' rouse out all 'ands!" grumbled Swansea, who had grown too weary even to threaten Skimps for his singing.

"The officers is havin' the same," remarked Old Sharley, quietly.

He, the oldest man in the forecastle, was as dog tired as the rest, his hands were as raw, his feet as frost-bitten; yet he found a bright spot in the blackest fog bank.

"Yus, an' they gets their rum, too!" snarled Bad Luck, his lips drawn tightly back, grinning like an angry monkey. "The Old Man's three parts drunk now. Why don't 'e give us a tot? 'E's too —— crool, that's why. 'E wants us to die o' cold an' wet. But wait! I ain't called Bad Luck fer nothink! I got the name, I'll 'ave the game, see if I won't!"

"Lot o' wind!" growled Swansea under his breath.

He was too weary to badger Bad Luck any more. But Old Sharley gazed intently at the angry young sailor. He knew when a man was on the ragged edge of sanity; he had recognized in the quieter outbursts of Bad Luck that near calm which so often precedes the fiercest storms.

" 'Ave patience, son, 'ave patience," said Old Sharley. "You been round th' Horn before. This ain't nothin' to upset a decent young sailor like you. This fog'll lift before mornin', then you'll see us rompin' to th' west'ard with flyin' kites, I betcha."

The ship rolled heavily, righted, and rolled down to leeward again until the seas thundered over her rail along her whole length. The big bell on the forecastle clanged brazenly; the sea chest on which Bad Luck sprawled in the forecastle carried away from its lashing and rolled down to leeward, hurling its occupant heavily against Old Sharley's bunk leeboard. Bad Luck glared fiercely, heedless of a crushed and bleeding finger on which the chest had landed.

"Patience! Patience, Old Sharley!" he screamed. "You say 'ave patience again an' I'll choke yer. My oath I will! Patience!"

Bad Luck stormed out on to the streaming deck, so furious in aspect that Sharley stole after him. But the youngster was stamping rapidly to and fro, forecastle sill to fore hatch, muttering to himself, and Old Sharley went back, satisfied that the pitch of danger had not yet been reached. But something Bad Luck said stuck in the old fellow's mind. He bent over Skimps.

"SKIMPS, me son, keep an eye on Bad Luck that 'e don't start nothink desp'rit. I'm goin' to see if I can't get the Old Man to deal us out a tot o' grog."

Swansea sat up as the old fellow hurried into his oilskins and started aft. Grog had a pleasing sound. Left alone, Swansea would never have dared think of asking for it; but if Old Sharley went for it, and by a miracle succeeded, Swansea was entitled to his share and would see that he got it.

"Don't be in a 'urry," grinned Skimps. "It ain't 'ere, yet."

He sang, softly:

"If I git there before you do,
Swing them gates ajar!
I'll keep a tot o' rum for you-hoo;
Oh swing them gates ajar!"

"Shut yer silly row!" snarled Swansea, rolling over into his damp blanket.

But he kept an eye on the forecastle door, and when Old Sharley returned, fingering his throat and followed closely by Bad Luck, Swansea was out on the floor before the door was well shut. Skimps glanced uneasily at Sharley, for the old fellow's kindly, peaceable face was dark with indignation.

"Git any?" Swansea wanted to know.

Bad Luck peered over Sharley's shoulder, trying to see under the fingers at his throat. Bad Luck's own finger dripped blood from an ugly, crushed wound.

"Wot's up, Old Sharley?" demanded Skimps.

Other men stuck out their heads, for Old Sharley was the father of the forecastle, liked by all hands.

"I didn't git any," said Old Sharley, queerly. He appeared dazed. "The Old Man said, 'Is it rum you want?' and wery near shook my 'ead off. I think he's crazy with—"

" 'E's drunk!" Bad Luck cut in fiercely. "I'm goin' to try my 'and. I bet 'e gives me some, if I kin—"

"Yus you will!" sneered Swansea, contemptuously.

The failure of the rum embassy aroused all his old rancor.

"If I don't, 'e'll go through the 'oop!" cried Bad Luck. "I'll—"

The door opened, and fog rolled in. There was icy wind, too, and a flurry of snow.

"Out you pop, me sons!" roared the boatswain, blusterous as the wind. "Tack ship, and furl th' courses! Rise an' shine, me lucky lads! Childs' play for noble sailormen like you! Shake a leg, there, Skimps! Chance for yer to sing at last. Get a gait on, Bad Luck. You're the strong and lusty lad as likes furlin' courses! That's you, Old Sharley; fust out as usual! What's eatin' yer, Sharley? Ain't mad, are you?"

Old Sharley went about the heavy work as in a dream. There was a strong wind making up, hurling the fog along in masses, dripping, gray; snow hurtled athwart the ship like frozen wool, white against the gray of the fog. A somber murmur came from the sea; crests were torn from the waves and volleyed against the steel fabric of the ship like small shot. The big ship lurched heavily in the hollows; she shouldered the graybeards from her stout bows thunderously. And above all sounds, of sea of wind, of laboring ship, the heart-chilling sough and swash of breaking seas about the base of solider stuff penetrated to drive men to frenzied effort.

"Ready about!" bellowed the skipper through the megaphone. "What are you doing, for'ard? Helm's a-lee! My ——, why don't you let go those head-sheets, Mister?"

The mate and his men worked swiftly and surely; the skipper's impatience was uncalled for. The jib sheets were already hammering their heavy blocks on the forecastle-head. Men cursed the skipper, and the mate let them curse. A sharp, light jar at the bows was followed by several more so quickly that they seemed to rattle; a dozen pieces of broken ice clattered along the ship's hull as she lost way and slowly came into the wind.

"Raise tacks and sheets!" roared the order.

And when the big courses were clear of their deck fasts, and the fore yards were aback:

"Haul mainyards!"

The ship once more scraped so closely along the face of the ice as to send a shiver through her men. Then they were driven to clewlines and buntlines, hauled up the foresail and mainsail, and clambered aloft to make the sails fast.

"What's bitin' yer, Old Sharley?" the boatswain wanted to know.

He and Old Sharley were where good seamen ought to be in furling, at the heavy bunt of the mainsail. Old Sharley worked fiercely, muttering through clenched teeth. No man had ever seen him so wrought up. He always worked splendidly. Now he hauled at his fistfulls of canvas, punched at it, swore at it, daringly gave both hands to the work with never a thought for safety. "A hand for the ship and one for yourself!" that oldest of sea laws for men aloft, seemed to have lost all meaning.

"Ain't sore at nobody, are yer, Sharley?" persevered the boatswain.

"Wery near shook my 'ead loose, 'e did!" muttered Sharley, savagely hauling at the skin of sail which he was forming to drop the bunt into.

"Who yer guffin' about?" growled the boatswain. "Bad Luck been goin' crazy?"

" 'E 'adn't no right to choke me!" breathed Old Sharley.

The boatswain gave him up with a curse, and hauled at his sail almost as fiercely as Sharley. From the invisible foreyard a babel of voices came across the fog and the wind and the snow. Sprays began to shoot high in the air as the ship gathered speed again. The melancholy fog-horn on the forecastle-head groaned out its dirge-like note, though no similar note answered it. A spray flung itself in the teeth of the men on the yards, and the babel forward changed to one-thought profanity. But there were strange spirits on the foreyard; a strange company.

"We'll haul-ah! And we'll furl-ah!
And pay Paddy Doyle for 'is boots!"

Skimps screamed the furling chantey at the pitch of his pipe, and a few voices joined in with him. But above the chorus pealed the shrill invective of Bad Luck.

" 'E'll answer me, any'ow! —— lummee we're men, ain't we? 'E kin 'ave 'is rum, all wropped up in good clobber, while we pore—"

"Stow that growsing and furl the sail!" yelled the second mate in the bunt of the foresail.

"Take a jump at yerself!" squealed Bad Luck, and Swansea supported him with a loud laugh. "I'm goin' ter see 'is nibs, any'ow!" vowed Bad Luck.

"We'll heave-ah! With a will-ah!
And pay Paddy Doyle for 'is boots!"

Skimps bellowed his chorus, and his mates kept it going until the sails were furled. By the time the men reached the deck again the watches were changed, and Swansea went to the wheel, Bad Luck to the lookout. And the ship stormed in toward the land, with a growing gale on her port bow, and ice to windward, land to leeward, and a skipper whose legs were so swollen from long standing that the steward could not drag his boots off; a skipper who, also, was beginning to show, unmistakably, the effect of three days of hard drinking.

"The Old Man's due to bust loose if he don't lie down and sleep pretty soon," the second mate grumbled.

"He's due to blow up if he don't quit sucking the bottle," retorted the mate. "If he wasn't so —— stingy, he'd deal out a tot once in a while. First ship I ever was in where all-hands job off the Horn wasn't worth splicing the main-brace."

"Why don't you help yourself?" grinned the second mate behind his hand. "I do!"

Swansea jerked his head forward to listen. The two mates were at the after end of the skylight, having just come from supper. The skipper stood swaying over the poop bucket rack, kept on his feet by the false energy of liquor. In all his wrappings he looked like a fat mummy. When he turned his face to scan the heavens or the sea, his eyes were cold and fishy; his lips smiled as a marble statue's lips smiled.

"What d'ye mean?" demanded the mate, glaring at his haggard but grinning junior.

"In his room. It's in the wash basin receiver. It isn't his. It's ship's stores. Steward told me. We ought to be getting it anyhow."

"I'll not go sneaking after it!" growled the mate.

But before the bells were struck again he found reason for leaving the deck, and was much less pessimistic when he returned.

"Find it?" grinned the second mate.

Swansea leaned forward to hear.

"I went to read the barometer," grunted the mate.

"Says southerly wind, don't it?" suggested the other wisely.

THE *Gauntlet* plunged forward into another night of murky invisibility, aggravated by a blizzard which grew denser. The rising gale drove the fog down the wind in massed clouds that collected the snow in wads.

Old Sharley entered the forecastle at the change of the middle watch, stiff and numb from his trick at the wheel. He only went to his bunk for pipe and tobacco, to soothe his misery with the five-minutes smoke permitted relieved helmsmen and lookouts. Swansea was there on the same errand, just off lookout. The gale had hardened; the ship was under short canvas, rushing landward again. The order had gone forth for all hands to stand by on the poop, for the maindeck was a hissing swelter of broken water in which life-lines could scarcely save a man's life or limbs. Swansea had spent most of his two hours lookout shinning up the forestay to escape thundering seas. He, too, was wet, and frozen, and miserable.

"A drop o' that rum 'ud go good now, Old Sharley," he said.

Old Sharley painstakingly shredded a pipeful of plug. Instead of the kindly, whimsical expression he customarily wore, even in the bitterest hours, the old seaman's face was puckered and dark with brooding.

"I think he's crazy with bein' up so long," he muttered, putting a spill of paper into the lamp and lighting his pipe.

"Crazy wi' rum!" snorted Swansea. "Wot say we brace up th' mate about a tot?'

" 'E never ought to 'ave choked me," came from a blue haze of tobacco smoke. "I'm goin' to—"

"That's you!" grinned Swansea. "Go up to 'im and make 'im understand you're a man, same as 'im."

Old Sharley carefully laid down his unfinished pipe, tied afresh the "body-and-soul" lashing which kept his oilskin pants and jacket together, and opened the door to battle his way aft. Swansea stuck his own pipe inside his sou'wester and followed, grinning.

On the poop, in darkness rendered weird by the driving fog and the ghostly flurries of snow which flew like material forms across the ship, two men stood at the wheel, with the mate watching their every action. The skipper gripped the rail, forward of the mizzenmast, slumped down into a squat, shapeless mass of clothes. Two lads crouched in the shelter of the chart-room, chilled and silent. The second mate, unaware of any good reason why he should not sleep in his watch below, even though he was compelled to remain on deck, stood propped against the mast, asleep on his feet. Old Sharley and Swansea covered the last twenty feet of the maindeck with a rush, reaching the poop ladder a short jump ahead of a roaring, boarding comber which knocked a life-boat to splinters on the gallows above their heads. They were gasping when they joined the rest of the men, huddled in the weather corner of the forward end of the poop. Two men among the crowd could not remain silent. Skimps sang softly, quaveringly, and nobody cared what he sang. If he wanted to sing in such weather, let him. Bad Luck stared fixedly at the squat form of the skipper, and cursed him. Let him curse. The men didn't care.

"Go on, Sharley!" muttered Swansea, gleefully. "Go an' spin 'im a cuffer. We're all 'ere."

Forward the fore topmast staysail hanks rattled. The main upper topsail flapped thunderously. The ship jerked upright.

"—— you! Watch her!" screamed the skipper, turning half around toward the wheel.

"I'm watching her, sir!" roared back the mate, angrily. "The wind's hauling!"

"You're not watching her!" retorted the skipper. "I'll come there myself. What good are you, anyhow?"

The mate swore in his muffler. The skipper resumed his lumpish attitude. His words were words only; but they had aroused bitterness in the mate, for he knew he was conning the ship keenly. The sails thundered again. The sea suddenly lost its broken virulence, and the ship, still leaning to the intermittent blasts, no longer sped through the water, but seemed to drag, to slide sluggishly as if driving up on clinging, semi-liquid mud.

THE skipper straightened up, turned aft, and started on a shambling run toward the wheel. As he passed the chartroom, the pencil of light streaming through the curtains over the fore ports shone on his haggard face. His eyes were swollen and half shut, but the glitter in them was devilish. His lips curled upward at the corners in the frozen smile which was a part of him.

"—— burn you, where have you put my ship!" he shrieked.

He raised his fists, tottered, and pitched headlong to the deck at the feet of the mate, whose glare of angry resentment changed into a stare of alarm as he stooped over the fallen man.

"Here! Come here, you men!" yelled the mate. "Pick the captain up and carry him below. Put him in his bunk and tell the steward to look after him. One of you cut off his boots. He's fainted."

Old Sharley, Swansea, and Bad Luck picked up Captain Tort and stumbled down the companionway stairs with him. He hung like a lump of clay in their hands, and they muttered over him as they caught the reek of rum. Midway of the stairs a bottle fell out of his voluminous wrappings. Swansea let go his grip and retrieved the bottle.

" 'Ere, after you!" snarled Bad Luck, letting go too, and reaching for the rum.

"Don't be in a rush," growled Swansea, thrusting the bottle inside his shirt. "Catch 'old of 'im, can't yer? Phew! Don't 'e stink!"

Old Sharley had gone on, dragging the skipper by the shoulders, muttering to himself incessantly. He seemed to take no notice of what the others did. When they took up their share of the burden again he made no comment. Swansea winked across the dim stairway at Bad Luck, and shook his head with a sidewise jerk towards the old seaman. They dumped the skipper into his bed, and Old Sharley turned to seek the steward. Swansea seized his arm.

" 'Old on!" he growled, and darted to the cabinet under the wash stand.

From the copper receptacle inside he pulled out another rum bottle, and held it up, grinning. Bad Luck leaped upon him with a curse.

"Divvy up, Swansea! Gimme it!" he cried, snatched at the bottle, and flipped a big red drop of blood from his crushed finger squarely upon Old Sharley's cheek as he stood in the doorway.

The steward, aroused by the sudden change in the ship's motion as much as by the noise, appeared in the saloon outside and peered in.

"What are you men doing here?" he cried.

Swansea and Bad Luck turned upon him savagely, and the frightened flunkey ran for his life on to the poop to tell the mate of the invasion of the captain's cabin.

"Go down and look after him!" the mate told him, and turned again to his scrutiny of the ship's strange situation.

Skimps leaned far over the rail with a lantern, trying to cast a circle of light upon the sea. The men clustered all around the poop rails. The sea no longer broke. The wind still blew, but more fitfully, and with diminishing force. The ship had a queer slithery motion, as if she sailed through heavy oil. But the fog had settled down in redoubled density; the snow fell like a blanket, the lantern light could not penetrate.

"Get over in a bowline," the mate told Skimps, anxiously. "See what's got hold of us."

The second mate had taken a bucket and line, urged by curiosity, and dropped the bucket overboard.

"Not moving!" he reported. Skimps was already being lowered over the rail, lantern in hand.

"Not moving?" echoed the mate.

For a moment he pondered. Then:

"Bring along the dipsey lead, bosun!" he ordered.

The lead line was divided into coils, and the heavy lead was dropped, as Swansea and Bad Luck came up from below, and the frightened steward seized the chance to dodge past them and go to the skipper.

"Forty fadom, sir!" the boatswain sang out.

"Forty ——!" the mate exclaimed. "We're aground, man!"

"Line says forty fadom," said the boatswain, stubbornly, and the mate snatched the line from him to try for himself.

Down at water's edge the vague circle of Skimp's lantern made the fog and snow appear like the sides of a well sunk in mineral salt. The light from the cabin ports revealed two feet of the rope he hung on; as he was drawn up he looked ludicrously like a phosphorescent spider on a gouty web.

"Can't see nothink but water, sir," reported Skimps, peering at faces.

The mate dropped the lead again. He found plenty of water, as the boatswain had. Skimps still peered, as if seeking somebody.

"Chips! Shackle on the port anchor and let go!" he ordered, uneasily. "Bosun! Find the second mate—where in —— is that second mate? Get the sail off her! Let the Old Man puzzle it out when he comes to!"

The second mate ran up from the saloon, his eyes wild. Behind him whimpered the steward, his eyes wilder still.

"The Old Man isn't there!" said the second mate. "I went down just to get a nip—"

"There's blood on the pillow!" chattered the steward. "When I first went to his room there was three men there, fightin'! Now the captain's gone!"

Bad Luck and Swansea darted swift glances at each other, for the terrified steward was looking at them queerly. With one mind both cried out together:

"Old Sharley threatened to—"

A heavy splash overside brought all hands to the rail, to stare into the impenetrable murk. The snow fell steadily; the wind had become an icy breath. Skimps concluded his scrutiny of the men's faces, and now, as the two mates shouldered him aside in running to the rail, he demanded shrilly:

"Where's young Jim? Anybody seen young Jim?"

Young Jim was the young apprentice whose ringing of the bell so upset Captain Tort. The lad was not among the crowd. The other boy huddled among them for company and security; but the youngster whose natural timidity had been so augmented by the terrors of the past days was not there.

"Go find him," the mate curtly ordered the other lad.

The second mate ran down the poop ladder, attracted by a yell from Chips who was coming aft after sounding the well; the mate and the crowd hung over the rail, listening, peering, hoping to catch sight or sound to explain that heavy splash. Sound there was, but not from the sea. The second mate's voice broke in sharply, answered by the indignant voice of Old Sharley, and the sarcastic note of Chips.

"Coming out of the saloon by way of the sail-room, hey?" cried the second mate.

"I seen 't was open, and I heard one o' the boys, sir," Old Sharley exclaimed.

"Bosun told me as 'e heard Old Sharley say wot 'e 'd like to do to th' capting," said Chips.

"Bring him up here!" the mate shouted. "Let go that anchor, bosun. And get the sail off her!" he told the second mate angrily. "You heard that order before. Have you all gone loony? You, steward, go make sure the Old Man's not looking for rum in the lazaret. The —— ship's like a madhouse!"

Old Sharley went up to the mate, tugging to free his arm from the grasp of the officious Chips. His weather-beaten old face was dark with trouble; his keen old eyes held in their depths a glitter of anger. He tried to speak to the mate, and persevered even though Chips shook and dragged at him to shut him up.

"Keep it until I ask you!" grunted the mate, busy making the ship secure. He was a harassed man, the mate, with a ship on his hands which had mysteriously gotten herself into a weird predicament, and a skipper who had somehow become the radial point for a mystery that promised to be as deep as that of the ship. He took a decisive step when the yards were on the caps and the men were all clewing up the sails. He ran below, stepped into the captain's cabin and, with but a cursory, almost contemptuous glance at the empty bunk, was about to open the wash stand cabinet when something in the bunk arrested his eye. He stepped nearer, and kicked something soft on the floor. There was blood on the pillow, as the steward said. Not a lot, but three heavy spots. The thing he kicked on the floor was a sou'wester; a small-size, lad's storm helmet. One of the skipper's sea-boots lay in the bed, ripped with a knife from top to instep. The other had been flung into a corner. And the cold, wet mist that drove in through the sail-room by way of the open maindeck door helped the rest of the situation to make the mate shiver violently. He again darted his hand toward the cabinet. Never had he felt the need of a warming dram so keenly. But the cabinet was empty, at least of rum. He returned on deck, almost running, and burst in between Swansea and Bad Luck standing inside the companionway each with a bottle to his mouth. They gave him no more heed than if he had been the frightened steward.

"Ho!" he said, sharply. "So you've been stealing the captain's rum, hey? And d'ye know the captain's missing? Chips! Bosun! Clap these men in irons!"

" 'T ain't them!" exclaimed Old Sharley. He had been kept quiet long enough. "I tell ye I heard one o' the boys. Must ha' been young Jim, and—"

"I knowed it, sir!" Skimps cut in excitedly. "When I was pulled up over the side I see the skipper sittin' up in 'is bunk. Through the porthole I see 'im, sir, and I was sure I see one o' the boys runnin' out o' the stateroom."

Skimps went over to the rail again, and peered down into the ghostly darkness. At a mute gesture from the mate, men seized Swansea and Bad Luck and Old Sharley, gripping them securely, not clear in their minds what it was all going to develop into, but sufficiently shaken by the bewildering happenings to want to blindly follow any leader who seemed able to direct them.

"No boy made the skipper vanish in smoke!" muttered the mate. "Lock 'em up in the sail-room, Chips! Bosun! Get a boat in the water. Something or somebody made that big splash just now. I'll row around the ship."

"I tell ye 't wasn't Swansea or Bad Luck neither! I was there arter they come out, an' th' Old Man was in 'is bunk then!" Old Sharley blurted out fiercely. "I heard one o' the boys—"

"There's blood on 'is face!" cried Swansea, pointing to Old Sharley in the flickering glow of a moving lantern. "Same as there is on th' piller! You can't lock me ner Bad Luck up for wot 'e done, Mister!"

"You old idjit!" Skimps muttered in Sharley's ear, running over from the rail. "Why 'n't yer keep yer mouth shut?"

The mate glared from face to face in utter befuddlement. The boatswain reported the boat ready. The dying air had freshened again, but from the north, directly opposite to its previous direction; and the ship rose and fell gently upon a powerful underrunning swell.

"PUT him in the sail-room," the mate said.

And, moving toward the boat, he beckoned to Bad Luck and Swansea.

"You two come along so I can keep an eye on you."

The precious pair obeyed, grinning at the ease with which they had wriggled out of trouble. The stolen rum had sharpened their wits, if it had not straightened out their crookedness. Skimps pushed into the boat, too, swearing under his breath at the fix Old Sharley had gotten himself into. As the boat rowed slowly around the ship, which vanished from sight at a distance of forty feet, the mate sounded alternately with lead and boathook. They could hear the swell lapping against the ship. They heard the creaking and groaning of gear as she rolled. Once or twice she rolled heavily, clattering her bell, and it sounded like a knell.

> "I don' care where they bury me;
> Swing them gates ajar!
> On th' land or in the sea-hea, Oh
> Swing them gates ajar!"

Sang Skimps, softly, pulling the bow oar.

"Make 'im stop it!" whined Bad Luck, appealing to the mate. "Ain't we bad orf enough wivout singin' a ditty like that?"

"H'm!" grunted the mate.

He pulled up the boathook, taking both hands. The boat stopped in spite of the oars. With much heavy breathing and some sweat the mate hauled over the gunwale a long, slippery, odorous thing that fell among the rowers' legs and made them start in fear. The mate flashed a closed lantern open, and the light shone upon a glistening, writhing, flat green thing that seemed devilishly alive while the boat rocked, but lay inert when the swell passed.

"Kelp!" muttered the mate, and stared at the dusky sea.

The fog swirled before the rising northerly breeze, and the lantern cast a glow around the boat. The sea writhed like reptilian life; it was smoothly flowing over a dense bed of kelp weed which was becoming tangled and massed under the change of wind and surface current.

"Give way, men!" he ordered. "If that's all that's holding us we'll get clear with the change of wind. Pull away!"

Stars winked though rifts in fog and snow. The ship appeared suddenly, her cordage whining in the freshening breeze. Lanterns flickered along her maindeck and poop. Excited voices challenged the increasing sounds of sea and ship, and the mate shot the boat alongside in haste to seek the cause of the uproar. Down in the waist, in the angle formed by the bulwarks and the break of the poop, where was the main-deck door of the sail-room, Old Sharley and the second mate talked loudly.

"What about the blood, then?" the second mate was saying. "Blood on your face, and blood on the pillow."

"It came from Bad Luck's smashed finger," asserted Old Sharley angrily. "What'd I want to croak th' Old Man for?"

"We 'eard 'im threaten th' capting!" broke in Swansea, climbing aboard in a sweat. "Th' capting throttled 'im becos 'e arsked for rum. Bad Luck 'eard 'im, didn't yer, Bad Luck?" Th' bosun—"

"What's the row?" the mate demanded. "I told you to lock this man in the sail-room, didn't I?"

"Aye, but look who's here," retorted the second mate, thrusting young Jimmy forward.

The youngster was whimpering. His face was red with scratches all down one side. Skimps pushed into the circle.

"I knowed it! I told yer so!" he cried. "I knowed 't wuz young Jimmy I see runnin' from th' skipper."

"Here, youngster, stow that blubbering and say something," commanded the mate.

The boy sobbed, tried to speak, but was too frightened. The mate grew impatient. The northerly breeze blew strongly; the ship began to pitch now and again; there was a less sluggish feeling to her motion as the changing swell rolled back the bed of kelp that had brought her to a halt.

"All right, then," decided the mate. "Get the ship under way. You'll talk, lad, when you're through bellering. Hold on to Old Sharley until he does. Get the topsails on her, and break out the hook."

"It wasn't Old Sharley!" declared the

steward. "Bad Luck and Swansea was the ones fighting."

" 'Twasn't them, neither!" maintained Old Sharley, stubbornly.

The mate shrugged his shoulders. The men trotted away to halliards and windlass. The fate of Captain Tort bothered them very little. He had never bothered himself much about them. And during the bitter stress of the past forty days their miseries had never once thawed the ice of his selfishness. Now if he was gone, good riddance. Somebody would have to stand the gaff, but that need not bother them either. They could even find spirit to sing, for a fair wind blew and their troubles bade fair to vanish.

"Only one more day, my Johnny,
One more day!
Oh come rock and rowl me over,
One more day!"

"Only one more day a-growling,
One more day!
Oh come rock and rowl me over,
One more day!"

The mate heard them, and let them sing. He was not entirely forlorn at the loss of the skipper. It meant a chance for him, and the skipper had not endeared himself to anybody. Those cold, fishy eyes, and frozen smile which was not a smile of merriment palled after many weeks of association with them. Of course, if murder had been done, it was incumbent upon the mate to bring the killer to justice. That, again, might mean wearisome delays in port. Perhaps the owners would not let their ship remain so long idle. They might send out another master, and tell Captain Tort's temporary successor to stay behind for the trial, if trial came. The thought brought no pleasant feelings. He was on the point of bawling orders to stop the singing.

A choking yell from the rail turned his attention to young Jimmy, who hung over the bulwarks staring into the sea. The fog had gone, the snow had ceased, the sea lay clearly visible, lapping crisply against the steel sides. The mate leaned over, too, but saw nothing at first. He shook the lad sharply, bidding him wake himself up.

He came after me when I passed his room, and I ran and hid!" the boy said, suddenly quiet.

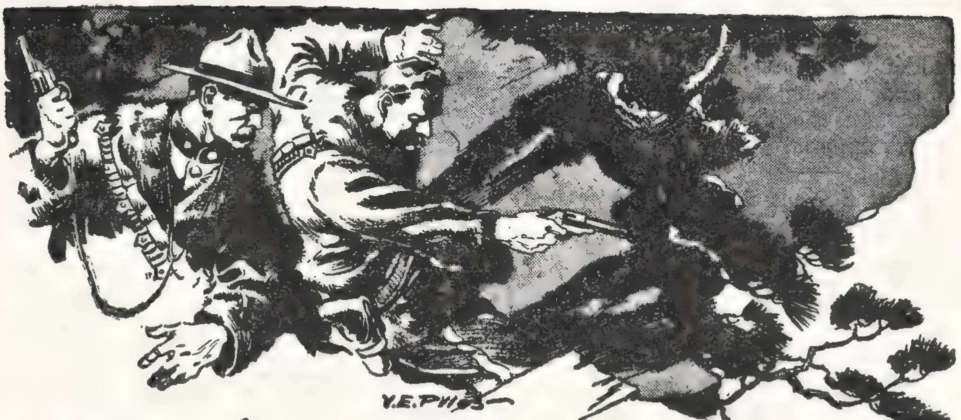
"What were you doing there at all?" the mate asked.

"Second mate sent me for his tobacco, sir. The captain grabbed me by the face. Look what he did! Nearly tore my ear off. Said I drove him mad with striking the bells. He came after me, barefoot, laughing as if he was crazy, and I dodged into the sail-room. He went on out the main-deck door, swearing he'd wring my, something, neck. I was scared silly, so I stayed hid. But look in the water, sir! There! Oh!"

The sea rose and fell, and the ship slowly moved toward her anchor. The topsails slatted, and were stilled as they were mast-headed. Only the creaking of the gear, and the *clink-clink* of the windlass pawls jarred the sibilant voice of the sea. Great stems of kelp streamed out southward, masses of it, like a vast bed of sea serpents all writhing toward the bleak Cape. At times the loathsome weed swirled to the surface, as if to remind the men aboard the ship that they might yet hold her. And one of those fathoms-long green-black tentacles lifted up for human eyes to see for the last time a squat, heavily wrapped figure, bare-footed, purple-faced, horrible. The kelp was wound about the fat neck. The eyes were open, cold, snakish; the lips were frozen in a smile that seemed to mock the prisoned ship. But even as the smile was plucked beneath the surface for ever by the out-stretching weed, the ship slowly moved on, over her anchor, and the broad sails filled with the fair breeze. It was as if an evil influence had gone out of the ship. Men at the windlass, for no apparent reason, howled their anchor chantey more lustily. The pawls clattered, clattered.

"Old Sharley," said the mate, "go and turn to."

He saw the ship safely on her course, and went to enter a suicide in the log, and the sail-room empty of prisoners. He even whistled, and patted young Jimmy on the head.



BOE *the* SPECTACULAR

A Complete Novelette by ~ Bruce Johns

Author of "The Valley of Remorse," "Evens Up," etc.

"FAIR fight" repeated "Dago" Jim Poechini sullenly.

"Fair? Fair?" Sergeant Wallace Stevens shouted into the proprietor's face. "Why he ain't got no gun on him nowheres!"

Stevens, straddled over the body, moved his deep black eyes across the faces of the crowd.

"Who did this?" he snapped. "He's shot behind the ear. Fair! My breeks!"

He saw only downcast eyes, fidgeting hands, fear-filled faces. They were hopeless ruffians, he thought, as he kneeled to give closer inspection to the wound.

Slowly moving his hands through the man's pockets in search for some identification, Sergeant Stevens passed the events of the week over quickly in his mind and saw that they were responsible for this new defiance.

It was late October, 1899. War with the Boers had come and little Taptown was on fire with word from the Queen, brought by telegraph to Wilkie and then on the work train cautiously creeping along the new C. P. R. branch, one-half completed into Upper Battleford District.

The Mounted Police post had been cut in half only this morning when six constables had gone to join Colonel Steele's Mounted Rifles by release from Regina. The caboose which the men had met ten miles below would not return until spring. The half built roadbed was closed tight by a number of heavy slides.

Taptown was caged away from civilization by impregnable trails for perhaps four months.

And in the background of this little town with its army of unemployed, its dance halls, its vicious amusements, was an organized system directing the movement of the puppets, controlling the profitable gambling games. At the head of this clique, the police suspected, was Boe, the man of daring, who, unseen except for spectacular sorties, had made himself in the past two years the most talked of criminal in the Northwest.

Playing a game of hide-and-go-seek with the Mounted farther south, occasionally writing them notes, mocking them with his clever English, defying them to come and seek him out—that was Boe, whose presence was now being felt in a mysterious manner in this little town of shacks.

Whether Boe was here was not known, but this strange person, wanted for murder, for robbery, for liquor-running to the Crees, certainly was beginning to sway the judgment of a certain group in Taptown. The sergeant now sensed that stronger than ever in the defiance of Dago Jim Poechini, known agent of Boe.

Sergeant Stevens partook of none of the secret admiration for a skillful criminal which many policemen have. He liked to stand face to face with a bad man. He was no fiction detective; he wanted action.

Suddenly he drew his heavy body upright and, looking straight into Poechini's scowling face, shot out a second command.

"Speak up, you!"

"Aw, go to ——"

Sergeant Stevens flung his heavy body forward in one leap. His fist smashed into the saloon-keeper's face.

Poechini fell back into the arms of the men pressed about him, only to be dropped as they broke and ran. He sprawled on his right hip and side, his arm flung out and away from his gun. He lay there, eyes bleared with pain, his hand easing slowly toward his holster.

"Don't do it, Poechini!" said the sergeant.

Poechini's hand stopped. He caught suddenly through the mist before his eyes the fingers of the sergeant creeping through a loosened iron clasp that held the flap of his fur coat.

Dago Jim Poechini had been in Canada long enough to realize that there was a gun under the sergeant's left arm pit.

"You no do it 'gain," he muttered as he climbed unsteadily to his feet.

"We'll see," snapped Stevens. "I asked you who did this an' you ought to know. If you're goin' to buck us this winter we want to know it right smart now."

Poechini looked quickly about the room and saw that he had no friends who at that particular minute cared to side with him. There was something about the scarlet Norfolk jacket, the blue trousers with double white stripes down the legs, the black boots with their German silver hunting spurs and the man inside; all this which had in the past dampened even a drunken rowdy's ardor for combat.

The saloon-keeper jerked himself together. The sergeant waited while patrons who had been crouching along the walls slid away toward the door and less danger.

"I got an idear you'll tell me 'fore I leave," he said.

"I won't!"

Stevens, without taking his eyes from those of the man before him, shouted to a group of men attempting to make the door:

"Get 'way from there! Close that door!"

The steady exodus stopped.

"Now, Dago," commanded the sergeant evenly, "come white with this right smart now. Everythin's closed, an' the chap can't get 'way easy."

"Won't tell you!"

"You're under arrest for murder."

"Me? Not me, you——"

HIS hand slipped to his belt. Sergeant Stevens, whose keen sense of being anticipatory was the reason for his living so long, at the same instant eased his hand further into the breast of his coat and with a short jerk a Colt came out like a snake and spoke at his side. Poechini whirled around to his right side and fell on his shoulder, his unsuccessful draw hurling his revolver many feet away.

"Kick over the gun, one of you chaps."

One man crept forward and kicked it across the floor. The sergeant thrust his own back under his arm, lifted Jim's gun, snapped out its cylinder and ejected each cartridge into the palm of his hand.

"You two," he continued, pointing to a group on his left, "take him upstairs and fix him up. Day or two will see him 'round. We'll take him to jail later if Captain Saunders wants it. Now the rest of you get 'round here in front. I got a somethin' to say."

The crowd reluctantly dragged forward. Poechini was lifted and carried away.

"Now," said the sergeant, "this is just a little informal gatherin' to tell you all the Mounted is cut in half. We ain't aimin', of course, to have much trouble because the boys has gone, but if it doubles because we are cut in half, then we're goin' to double our shootin' nerve. Jus' matter of simple arithme-tic.

"Now who's got a somethin' to say?"

There was a restless, sullen silence, while the sergeant's eyes snapped from face to face. Suddenly they halted as they fell upon a big, strapping youngster, probably twenty-three years old, with a keen, stern chin and two large blue eyes that returned stare for stare.

Stevens looked at the neatly trimmed blond hair and new unoiled boots.

"Greenie," he thought. "Some mother cryin' tonight over her wanderin' boy."

The sergeant had not seen such a straight pair of shoulders outside of his own outfit for many a day. He looked at the even, rounded build of the boy, and envied him for his youth, his strength and the health that testified silently of clean living—a bright contrast, Stevens thought, among most of these men.

"Real boy," the sergeant amended his thoughts. "His mother may be cryin' but I guess he can take care of hissel'."

Then his voice boomed:

"You! That young chap there. The one with the yella hair. You, I mean. Come here!"

"You speaking to me?" said the boy clearly. "All right, but my name's not 'You.' "

He pushed his way through the crowd and stepped briskly before the sergeant.

"What you-all want?"

"If your name ain't 'You,' " snapped Stevens, "what is it?"

"Flitton. Dick Flitton."

"From the States, Mr. Flitton?"

"Memphis."

"Where's that?"

"Tennessee."

"Been here long?"

"Few days. Was to get a job as chain man. Came all the way up for it and then work quit early."

"Why didn't you go back to the States?"

"That's my business, of course."

"U-um. Sheriff." There was the conviction of a policeman in the sergeant's voice.

The boy grinned.

"Have it your own way, if you wish."

"Hm. Well, you was at the table, wasn't you?"

"Yes, I was playing."

"I thought so. They al'ays get the greenest man in town into a game at this table."

"Well, I'm no greenhorn," said the boy hotly. "They weren't taking me down the row as a sucker either."

"Well, they sold you a pack of trouble, mebbe, boy. Who shot this chap, Mr. Flitton?"

"A big fellow with an open mouth. Jens Muth, I think they called him. He shot while the fellow had turned away to argue with the fellow you just shot."

"Demuth," corrected the sergeant. "Thank you. Don't try to leave town, Mr. Flitton. You couldn't make it, anyway."

Then he turned to the crowd. Information, now that the wanted man was known, came freely. The slain man was Tom, last name unknown, a mucker for the railroad who had made the wrong remark at a moment when he had lost the last cent of his travel check.

"Jens musta thought he was a-goin' to shoot," they argued. "Tom was makin' a lot o' noise 'bout maybe goin' to kilt somebody."

After ordering the body removed to a vacant room above, the sergeant turned and strode out of the saloon. It now became the duty of the Mounted to act as coroner, public administrator and informant to relatives, if the man had any, as well as funeral director.

Stevens thought solemnly as he slowly mounted the single stony trail up the high hill to where the post sat squarely on the ridge, some two thousand yards above.

"We got to get Boe within three months, or take the results," he muttered aloud, as he plodded on, clenching his mittened fists.

II

AS HE climbed the tortuous trail, soon to be the only accessible path by which the jail could be reached when snow set in heavier, Sergeant Stevens pondered deeply upon what had come upon the little town.

The lawless gang of Boe, the whisky traders, the gamblers, the petty thieves, the seventy-five idle workmen who had stayed behind. Blind to the terrible winter that was to come, they thought only of spending and winning the travel checks and what else there was to be gained in the riotous pleasures of a Wild West fiction town.

All these were here, building Taptown into a single unit of lawlessness, which must be suppressed by—he strained mentally at the word—withered forces. Stevens went a little bitter when he used the word. He was withering, perhaps. He recalled now the report of the commissioner of the R. N. W. M. P. more than ten years before, and a cynical smile played beneath his great mustache.

"Only first-class men can stand five years in the force."

He had been in the business twenty-four years! Why, he had been a sub-constable under the famous Colonel Steele and seen the Indian treaties of August 24, 1876 signed. That was twenty-three years ago. He had been such a kid. Lied to get into the service.

Taptown post included, now, Captain

Saunders, superintendent of the district, himself, Corporal Henry and six constables matched against more than one hundred rowdies and the missing but ever-present chief, Boe. After all, it was with Boe that Sergeant Stevens was concerned. He was Boe, the gambler; Boe, the killer; Boe, the renegade school teacher; Boe, the educated orator; and, above all, Boe the spectacular.

The chin of Stevens was thrust deep into the fur of his greatcoat when he stopped at the office of his chief and kicked sharply with his toes against the doorstep to remove the snow from the creases of his boots. He turned and saw Corporal Henry going into the jail gate and called instructions to him. Then he punched the door open and walked in without ceremony.

He found Captain Saunders sitting at his rough board desk, his head deep in his official report to Regina, which was to go by runner late that day, and which would be the last connection between the White River Valley post of the Upper Battleford District and the outside world for at least four months.

Superintendent Saunders had been with his Mounted Police along the rights of way years before when the C. P. R. was making its first thrusts through Canada's wilderness. His job had been watching, not company affairs, but those of the parasites who follow always with the rails, taking the workmen's wages and giving them "diversions" in return.

It was his success with railroad construction hangers-on in the previous thrust that had caused his chief to place him again in command of law enforcement when the company decided to press into the rich White River Valley.

Captain Saunders was past fifty-five, broad shouldered and stood three inches over six feet. He had the appearance of the old-timers who had given the force its daredevil and brilliant record. With sharp black eyes, chiseled nose, straight-lined mouth and a body that stood erect as one encased in armour, he belied his age by fifteen years. He liked to be called "Sandy," even by his men.

In contrast, Sergeant Stevens was short and thick, a beefy individual with a flat stomach. His deep black eyes had an embarrassing manner of boring holes through you. He had high, square cheek bones like a battle-worn pugilist and a long, drooping, yellow mustache that caused the constables to turn "Wallace" into "Walrus." He was best known to all, however, as Sergeant Wally. He was a stern disciplinarian, beloved by his men.

The district force had always been small. Fought by tax repressionists in Parliament who had never been into Canada's ever-opening frontier, Captain Saunders found himself handicapped in keeping order in the five posts he commanded. The other posts had able sergeants, and must look out for themselves during the winter. He had picked his old staff-sergeant to be with him during the winter and was satisfied. He also had taken the post most advanced and difficult to manage, as usual.

The work of executive, judge, and, often, legislator fell to his lot. Offenders who had been arrested by him found themselves before him the following morning or even the same day in his little office. It was the law. The code carried the fact that superintendents were both apprehenders and punishers. His sentences seldom called for a second. There were few in Taptown who had been two-time losers. In that wild little town, however, were many whose police records linked them with many terms in the penitentiaries of both Canada and the United States.

Sergeant Stevens threw his cap over the arm of a chair and sat down without a word. When not on duty or before strangers the two were just cronies. The difference in rank was discounted by years of comradship which had begun during a raid of the young Blackfeet on the young Crees some time in the eighties when both were constables. They had been cornered and fought it out shoulder to shoulder and dragged each other over the dead and wounded after it was ended. They would never forget it.

Captain Saunders licked the big linen-lined envelope, struck a match and sealed it with wax and tossed it to the corner of the table.

"Trouble on your mind, I see."

"Aye. Just come from the Dago's saloon. Chap named Tom something-or-other killed. No gun. This Jens Demuth did it."

"That makes the third in three days. At that rate thirty in a month. Five months makes 150 murders. Much work, Wally, much work. Enough to keep us warm this winter. You have Demuth, of course."

"No. Corporal Henry and two of the boys are after him now. Be here any minute with him, I guess. Can't get 'way 'less he gets to some mighty good hidin' place."

"And my old friend Boe we hear so much about but never see?"

"No connection. A card-game quarrel. Shot back of the ear. Rotten business. The crowd is sour-bellied, too. Had to pop the dago in the arm. He darn near got his up to level."

"You're never lost the old slip method, I see, Wally. Always did claim it had the hip shooting beat since we have the double action guns. But I tell you this, Wally, six-shooters are too nakedly carried in this town."

"It's a fac'."

Conversation ceased. Wally reached over the desk, obtained an envelope cutter and toyed with its sharp edge against his thumb. Captain Saunders searched vainly through his blouse for a cigar.

"Well, say it," he snapped, a bit irritated by his failure to find a cheroot.

"It's ——!"

"Close to it—were it warmer weather. Boe! Still water, that chap and his crowd. What?"

The sergeant mumbled in his throat.

"Nine men all told against about one hundred. All ruffians, Wally. I say it without qualification."

"But there may be a couple of likely chaps down there. One big, yella-haired boy I fancy very much. Besides, we have Ross rifles, good snowshoes, good American Colts, good sense."

"Bad men's bullets cut as deep a hole as good men's, Wally. Some of them shoot —— straight, too. 'Specially this Boe person. Wally, have you thought much about that fellow? I remember this Boe very well up north. He had a sort of servant called Demuth, too. Nasty fall this Boe had. Heard later he died from it, but evidently reports are always rumors."

"IN THE month we been here," said Wally. "I haven't seen him, either, or he'd be at Regina now, but the other boys have. On the trail—always at his own good, safe distance. They tell me he had guns stickin' on him as common as points on barbed wire and takes chances when they're as bad as ninety per cent. agin him.

"Think of six months ago when he walked into a band of drunken Crees and talked 'em into goin' 'cross the border to raid that little bank. He got the money, and the Indians, more liquor. Then he played try-an'-get-me on both sides of the border for ten days with the U. S. marshal, and our boys killin' horses tryin' to catch him. He's on foot all the time, too, and they seen him ten times in as many days. Now I want to see him."

"The Regina courts would like to, also. But I tell you, Wally, it is the people in this rotten little town who are the trouble now. Even the decent chaps down there make a hero out of this invisible daredevil. He's some sort of wild actor who loves applause. And I know he is within sound of applause, too."

"I expect he'll be back," said Wally. "I think Demuth is one of them stupid chaps who Boe doesn't take with him on his big jobs. That is why we have never heard of him on the jobs. But a few murders ain't much for this Boe. He'll be here somewheres."

"Perhaps you are right," returned the superintendent with a twinkle in his eye. "He's played the trails all summer and the trappers, too. Gad, Wally, I never saw such success. His hand was in the payroll robbery three months ago down at the Kirby Junction post. It was clever. He was not at the robbery, that is positive, nor at the holdup of the Main Street saloon below, at Banscoot. Yet those who confessed said he planned it. The poor devils who were hanged for the murders at those jobs said they did it because he talked them into it. Yet it all sounds rather silly, this talking, doesn't it?"

They smiled, but there was a reserve to it.

"There must be somethin' in these new dude-writin's 'bout criminal nuts," averred Wally dubiously. "I have an idear anybody that can talk 'nother into doin' murder for him is crazy somewheres in the head. Like the one what does it. Eh?"

There was a thump at the door.

"Come."

The door swung open to admit Corporal Henry, two constables, and Demuth between them. The prisoner hung loosely to the constables, his large mouth sagging with fright.

"I ain't done nothin'," he stated weakly. "He pulled his gun first."

He pointed to a holster held in the corporal's hand.

"But I let 'er go 'head o' him."

"Self defense; eh?"

Demuth brightened.

"Yea, captain. He'd o' beaded me 'tween the eyes. He made a swipe at his hip pocket."

"Mr. Demuth," replied Captain Saunders quietly. "This is the first case on record where a bullet turned a corner. If he was just about to bead you between the eyes he would have been looking where he was going to shoot. Yet you got him behind the ear. You're held for Regina, Mr. Demuth."

The prisoner closed his weak red eyes and swayed his weight on those supporting him. But suddenly he remembered something of importance. His mouth snapped open.

"Uh! You mebbe ain't goin' to get me to thata place, you red-bellies!"

"Just a question before you go," said Saunders evenly. "Were you ever at Broken Moon?"

Demuth stared for a moment as if fascinated by the name.

"Aye! ——! So was you!"

Captain Saunders nodded to the constables and they went out, dragging their heavy prisoner.

"Well," said Sergeant Wallace Stevens, "that's one. Now for Boe."

"Demuth must stay here until reinforcements come up in the spring," said Saunders. "If Boe wants his henchman before that time he must come and get him."

"Mebbe he will."

Captain Saunders smiled broadly.

"You know Pete Lefevre?" he asked.

Wally did not bother to answer. Of course he knew Canada's greatest living Indian interpreter. He had known him more than twenty years and so had the captain.

"Well, if by chance you do," continued the captain, "it may interest you to know he came in this morning."

He rose from his chair and began to swing himself back and forth on his ankles.

"He's got funny habits," said Wally. "I hope you had the presence of mind to tell him to stay."

"He did most of his work before he got here."

"Aye," urged the sergeant.

"And it may interest you to know he reports Boe back in Taptown. Back right in Taptown for the winter. He can't get away. He's not good enough to get out of this place in winter."

Wally rose and swung himself back and forth in perfect imitation of his chief.

"Aye," he said, "aye."

They sat down again. Wally dug into his breeches hip pocket and brought forth a clay pipe which he stuffed violently with chip tobacco from the captain's desk box. Then he held out his big hand and twitched his fingers. Saunders threw a match across the table and watched him draw laboriously and loudly at the pipe.

"Wish I had a cigar," said Sandy gruffly. "I think better with one."

Wally wandered his hairy paws through the side pocket of his bearskin coat which he had placed over the chair behind him.

"Here," he said, proudly producing a dilapidated cigar. "Some one of the boys give it me 'fore they went out this mornin'. Got it in a box from home."

Captain Saunders reached out an eager hand swiftly and grasped the offering.

"Thanks, Wally."

He surveyed the cracked cheroot with full cheer.

"Last Christmas box, I suppose."

He applied his tongue to the loosened flaps of its wrapping, produced two cigaret papers from the confusion of his desk drawer, wet them and deftly rolled the cigar anew. Sticking the grotesque object in his mouth, he struck a match and slumped in his cane chair enjoying his first cigar in several days.

They fell to smoking and thinking.

"I hate bloodshed," said the captain at last.

Wally grunted—

"Aye."

They puffed great volumes of gray smoke into the close room. Through it Wally blinked his deep eyes, and pulled the great mustache.

"That bundle won't stand chewing," he said at last.

Sandy stopped the violent mastication with a jerk and spit a wad of cigarette paper and cigar in the general direction of the sand box.

"You broke into my idea," he retorted angrily. "I think we better get Boe before morning."

"Good idear. Good idear!" muttered Wally in a tone that did not lack sarcasm.

"Boe the spectacular," meditated Saunders slowly, as if he were rehearsing a very trite phrase. "He is on the grounds to have a real picturesque time."

"Captain," replied the sergeant, suddenly formal. "I don't like us bein' afeered of this Boe."

Saunders lifted his great form with one jerk of his forearms. Then he smashed his fist on the table. Wally sat silently pulling his mustache.

"—— you!"

"Thank you, sir."

The captain swung on his ankles as Wally continued to send clouds into the air.

"Why 'thanks'?" he asked at last.

"'Cause you give me what I need."

"What do you need?"

"Temper," snorted the sergeant. "Temper—two thousand pounds pressure."

A slow smile went across the captain's face.

"Well then I guess I better tell you a little story. You'll have time to cool off before you rush out and get yourself all shot up, and besides I have never told you very much about this Boe fellow. I met him years ago. That is about all I have bothered to tell you because I never thought it made much difference one way or the other.

"But it's getting to the point now, Wally, where we've got to go get him. Either he runs the town or we do, from now on. And let me tell you, Sergeant Wallace Stevens, the M. P. is going to run this little gunman's paradise—or I won't know it because dead men can't hear very well.

"Now, we're to be dealing with an insane man."

"Don't look at me as if I were one, Wally. Just as soon as I talk of anything outside of the service, our equipment, the war, or our Queen—God bless her—you're lost. You're out of your water. Whether you like it or not, I'm going to tell you because I want you to know Boe is a real menace now. For he has a hatred above all things for the Mounted Police. Now you listen. You've got to. Got another something of some kind to smoke?"

"You darn' old mind-reader," muttered the sergeant, producing another and even more dilapidated cigar, "you knew the boys give me another, somehow. I was goin' to keep it for your Christmas present this year."

"A-ha. Thank you, Wally. Thank you. Now listen. I'll tell it to you just as a story I have pieced together from being one of the actors in it. None of this 'I did this' and 'I did that,' but I'm the inspector mentioned in such a laudable manner. I'll just call him Saunders, just as if I wasn't the man. And I am why Boe is here.

"Boe and Demuth, as the yarn will disclose, were my special guests just about four years ago. It was during this time I got many of the facts of this story. Boe loved to talk. It all happened on the trail up north just before I got my promotion. You were down at Lethbridge District, as I remember. Only time we were ever separated, eh?"

III

AND this is the story the captain told:

Boe and Demuth were sitting in the snow-slush near a pile of overturned stones, begrudging each other mouthfuls of stale pemmican and paste cakes—hard tack some call them.

They hated each other suddenly because they had been starving to death up to a few minutes before, and now each feared the other fellow was taking more than his share. Sort of belly-greed.

They said words that might have meant one of those vicious and ruthless fights of hands, feet and teeth under other circumstances. But it was 'way, 'way below and they were dead tired and sick of each other. Rather wishing they were dead—providing the death came painlessly.

The harshest words came as hands met in the grub tin.

"Get 'way, —— you!"

That from Boe.

A muttered "*Cochon!*" from Demuth.

Beside them lay their empty knapsacks, flung aside when Demuth's dragging feet had disclosed a canvas tag.

"Prop. of Kelsey McGraw. 9/9/95. Hands off or feel the miners' law."

That was written on that tag.

It was a food cache, protected usually so securely by the unwritten law of the great gold rush, as you know.

Three packs of soiled and greasy playing cards had scattered from the sack of Demuth, and there had been the rattle of dice and three walnut shells as Alexander Boe had flung his bag away. They didn't have a very brave business in those days.

As they sat there stuffing their bellies, Boe lifted his eyes, and against the gray sky on the ridge over which they had just come he saw five men. They were coming down.

"——! Here comes some one. We'd better make a go for it. Might be some out of Blue Camp looking for us. I told you, you rat, to keep your dirty, thieving hands off that gold dust!"

Demuth leaped to his feet and gathered his belongings with flying hands.

"It was right thar fer the takin', thata gold," he muttered by way of apology.

"Well, get!"

Demuth scrambled away.

"It's in thata coat pocket o' yourn," he took time to accuse.

They did not replace the stones; just let the food—plenty of it—lie there to mold or rot or go down the throat of some skulking wolves like themselves. It was proper enough to eat a little if you were starving to death, of course, but to deliberately allow it to be destroyed when it might save the owner's life—well that was a capital offense up there.

Before they had trekked three miles their carelessly overtaxed stomachs, filled with the coarse, cold food for the first time since they had cross the Yukon line to American soil, turned sour.

Demuth, the big chap with the loose mouth and eyes that were red and puffy from much watching of his feet, gave first signs of distress.

"—— food!" muttered the big fellow, turning to Boe who was shuffling along ten feet behind.

Boe did not raise his head. He, too, was doggedly eyeing his feet, as if they were a mechanical device that would see him through if carefully watched. He was wrapped hugely in a bearskin coat; his bony knees showed through his baggy trousers and gave sufficient proof that he was scrawny and unfit for the journey. An arm was thrust into the opening of his coat and his fingers gripped his aching belly. Bent over in his agony, he presented little of the bravado for which he had been famous on the trail the previous summer.

He was a shrunken man, prematurely old, standing perhaps five feet eight inches. The undeveloped face of a dreamer, the only remnant of Boe's early days which still clung to him, was masked now with a little more bitterness, cynicism and hatred of things in general, which the hardship of the past winter had stamped there. The magnetism of the man, which had brought to him hundreds of patrons of the pea and shell game when a deadly winter had already made its sinister presence known, was lost in his bitterness against himself for having dismissed his intelligence at the sight of food.

"Get the —— out of my way!" he snarled suddenly in the tone he had used for many months to his henchman. "If you lack guts to make your way, drop aside and die, but let me get on to help!"

Demuth obediently stepped aside and Boe pushed past without raising his eyes.

"The Broken Moon trail comes in about five miles down," said Boe when they had trudged along another mile.

He spoke in the voice of one reiterating information both knew well.

"But them miners comin' back there," Demuth answered in the same tone. "An' they'll find we tuk thata grub and didn't cover it. Or mebbe they'll know we tuk thata dust."

"You keep that ugly trap closed. How are they to know? Besides there's a Canadian M. P. there, as we know —— well. He won't let them do anything. There's no proof we got the dust."

He reached into his belt and suddenly hurled a pouch away.

"It's gone," he muttered.

Demuth didn't even notice.

"What kin the M. P. do on 'Merican groun'?"

"Well, I remember he kicked us on last fall."

The eyes of Boe must have flashed in bitter remembrance.

"He might not have had authority, but he told us to pack up the dice and the shells and skip, didn't he? We got into a —— of a fix when winter broke, didn't we? I think we did.

"We bunked all winter in a hole where it was 40 below, didn't we? And were kicked out when the miners said we could make it O. K. down the opened trail? I guess we did. We could have stayed at Broken Moon and been snug all winter if this cop with no authority hadn't ordered us out, couldn't we? You shut your —— mug tight 'til we get there and hold it shut then or I'll seal it with lead. I've had enough of your gab. I'm sick enough of you!"

Boe was right about the M. P. It was a strange situation up there. No special police authority at all, but sort of consul to help Britishers on the border. Did boost undesirables along a bit but nevertheless never made arrests. Captain Constantine had several of the boys in U. S. territory that winter and later, as you know.

Little thanks in those jobs, but the U. S. liked us there, just as we wanted their marshals over on our side of the line. It was real reciprocity, that system. I wish they'd put it into effect again.

Well, Demuth, as usual, had no answer to make to his chief. They clambered on down the slippery trail. Early spring snow had begun to fall in a last effort to replace that already gone by the recent thaw. The walking had eased their digestive pangs a bit and they made better speed toward the post.

Boe and Demuth were only partly wrong about those miners coming on behind them. They knew nothing of the gold dust, but about the food—well, it belonged to Kelsey McGraw, who was coming out of Paradise Lost camp as a member of that party.

McGRAW had depended upon his cache with his Scotch faith in human nature. When he had placed it he never knew the Broken Moon post would be pushed up so far in his absence. He arrived in Broken Moon roaring like a wounded lion three hours behind the thieves. With him were six other miners who had expected to share that cache.

The snow had been too light to cover the heavy foot-prints of Boe and Demuth around the cache and from there to the post.

The two professional gamblers were snugly hugging the fire of Inspector Saunders' little hut when McGraw and his friends marched in.

"Where's them thieves?" shouted the miner.

Inspector Saunders had been listening to a tale of hardship the extent of which he had seldom heard before and sympathy was overcoming his disgust for such visitors as Boe and Demuth. He turned slowly to the newcomers.

"I heard you," this inspector said.

"These men——dir-rty Glasgow keelies! They tuk that grub o' mine, and spilt it 'round!"

"I can't arrest," Saunders said.

"We'll do the 'r-restin'!" shouted another of the miners.

He grasped the shoulder of Demuth who was sitting paralyzed with fear on a cane chair.

"They must be allowed to defend themselves," protested Saunders.

Another miner spoke up.

"Lis'en here, inspector; we ain't got no kick at you. You chaps has helped everybody here. Everybody knows it. The trail wouldn't be rottin' with dead men this spring if you had more authority. But we're aimin' to stop food thieves. It might mean death for the owner to find his cache robbed. It might o' been here too if we didn't find this post moved up."

"We come out o' camp with the seats o' our breeks out and —— well broke, hopin' fer at least some grub—and there it is lyin' out in the slush all mud and everythin'. It makes us —— mad!" added another.

"It does," Saunders said.

"I vote fer stringin' 'em!" shouted another miner. "They'll make the sixth hangin' this winter fer the same thing!"

Demuth had gone limp in his chair and would have fallen off but for the retaining hands on his shoulders. Boe, his face livid, his mouth sagging open, but his eyes glittering, keen with intelligence, jerked himself painfully to his feet. He knew now they were not from Blue Camp and were not the ones from whom Demuth had stolen the gold.

"—— no!" he said.

Then he started to defend himself in the even, soft tone that many a schoolboy in the States would have easily recognized, I think.

"Human law is not confined to boundaries," he pleaded. "It is international! It is for society wherever found. I call upon you, inspector, as a member of an organized police force, to safeguard me from these men."

Nothing about Demuth.

Inspector Saunders turned away from him.

"Your theory is good," he said, "but you're calling upon me only as a guest in U. S. territory. Of course you must have a trial."

"And by a jury of accusers!" shouted Boe. "Is this justice?"

"Our justice!" McGraw informed him loudly. "In absence o' a deputy mar-rshal."

Inspector Saunders' face perhaps grew very grave.

"I see no immediate rush," he stated. "I will hold these men for you, if you say so, until others come in and we can get disinterested parties."

McGraw placed his face, still burning with anger, close to Saunders'.

"They'll be punished now. They bur-rked us!"

"I have no authority," repeated Saunders angrily, I would say, "to use any police force whatsoever in American territory. However, I think I can act as a human being in any place in the world."

A miner, who had eased his way behind Boe, thrust forward suddenly and in a flash had Boe's revolver in his hand. There was a short struggle and Demuth was also disarmed. The miners began to drag them out of the hut.

"My ——, you shan't do this!" shouted Saunders. "What good will revenge do? The food is gone for good. You're safe here. It won't bring back the food to hang these chaps!"

McGraw's desire for revenge had been appeased somewhat by a smashing blow he had sent into Demuth's face in the short struggle. He stopped and seemed to think it over.

"Aye," he muttered solemnly. "Aye. But twa men dead ain't much deff'rence."

"I won't see them hang," said Saunders, and I can tell you first hand he meant it right then.

McGraw was a sentimental Scot, like most of them, and he was beginning to run down. Besides the inspector's hand was resting on his gun.

"I won't see it!" Saunders repeated.

"Aye," agreed McGraw after a moment. "You won't, but you'll see 'em goin' down to Seward tacked as keelies."*

"That is better than hanging," replied the inspector, "since you must pay them off. I can only say I am sorry the Dominion's authority is lacking."

Boe and Demuth went down the trail the next morning with their hands securely strapped to their backs.

"This is a thief. Pass him along," cried placards on their shoulders.

They went on down. A freeze had come in the night and they were walking on a veritable river of ice. They were too disheartened to speak, but at last Boe raised his voice in one protest:

"That —— M. P.! He should have defied them. Coward!"

"He was only one louse in the hair," mumbled Demuth in his throat. "At that, he keep thata gang from stringin' us."

Boe, infuriated by the slightest defense of the police, swung around, deliberately intent on using his feet—his only weapon—upon his henchman. But fate was there again, a fate that was to follow him in the next years through his famous campaign in the White River Valley of Battleford, Canada.

His infuriated swing at Demuth and his tied hands caused him to lose his balance. He crashed back. His head struck. For a second Demuth stared, then, suddenly nauseated at the sight, he went to his knees, retching in great sobs.

The spell over as suddenly as it had come, he raised his head and dumbly watched for his master to arise. He floundered over to him and knelt there, looking upon Boe like a frightened child. Seeing no stir of life, Demuth arose to his rickety feet and retraced this steps carefully to Broken Moon.

"Boe spilled his brains on a rock," he announced. "Mebbe kilt him, thata smash."

Boe lay for many days unconscious in the hut of Inspector Saunders. He would never be the same, the miners said when they came and looked at him mumbling in his restless sleep. He was daft!

"That —— M. P.!"

He muttered the phrase continually. Then came consciousness and nursing of the ungrateful patient by the inspector. Then recovery.

They gave Demuth and Boe food, an expression of sorrow for blazing tempers, and sent them down the trail on snow-shoes. They made it: The Scales—Sheep Camp—The Cañon—Dyea—Skagway—Seattle.

IV

THE cigar had gone out as it lay balanced on the edge of the table and was now somewhere on the floor. Captain Saunders lifted his shoulders and his hands in one gesture.

"So you see, Wally, this Boe chap hates me a little—and on top of it he is crazy. He hates me for refusing to die for him defending his rotten life against those miners. Believe me or not, they were ready to kill, and did do considerable of it that terrible winter.

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*Identified as thieves—Scotch.

"Boe has one idea in his head and that is to pay me back in any manner possible. He has always broken the law, and naturally that is the way he has determined on. He has been in my district for the past year. I suppose it took him a long time to recover fully. He has never come into the special post I was commanding until now. But here he is, Wally."

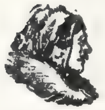
"An' the time to get him is tonight," said the sergeant.

"You're right. Say, did you steal that cigar?"

They sought the cigar and Saunders carefully rubbed it off with the base of his hand.

"An Indian runner that Lefevre has recommended is to take this report out," continued the captain, "and he will be the last man to get out of here this winter. He'll have a hard time doing it. I will not hear of a single other person trying it, and as for Boe, well, I don't want him to leave—that way."

V



DARKNESS had long fallen when the two walked out of headquarters and slammed the door. The rough closing of the door was a habit of Saunders'. It meant nothing of temper—that was gone. Stevens smoked peacefully into the snappy air. Captain Saunders carefully arranged the collar of his buffalo coat and straightened his fur cap. It was as if they were going to the home of Mr. Tam, the company representative, for a game of whist with tea and soda biscuits later on.

"I believe," said Wally as they trekked along, "our cook makes tea too strong for my stomach. I feel that last jugful."

"I believe," retorted the captain, "that we should sneak in like a bally lot of burglars and nab him asleep."

"Boe never snoozes. We ought to just find him with his friends and drag him out. If it mus' be a fight—well, I have two guns and a bandolier over my left shoulder."

"The same arsenal here— Whoa! What's that?"

A figure had crossed the end of the street and gone into the shadows of the walls of Taptown into which they were just coming. The "avenue de l'enfer" lay at their feet. They stopped short and separated with an agility that would have evoked the envy of men twenty years their junior. Not a word had been uttered after the captain's exclamation.

"We're touchy," now came the voice of Wally from a shadow. "Sandy, it's Lefevre."

Pete came along the wall like a swift shadow. He was a tall, bony figure, originally from the Missibaibi River district, but had gained his early experience around James Bay. A wanderer by force of his Indian blood, and a linguist by force of his Latin ancestry, he had been throughout "the land of a million lakes" for thirty years; picking up as he moved the tongues of almost a hundred tribes. He knew the ways of the outdoor human better than any living man.

Lefevre was a scout who might appear anywhere at any time. For the past twenty years he had more or less affiliated himself with the Mounted Police. He had been present at the treaties of 1876 and, with the equally famous Jerry Potts, aided in the interpretation of the contents of the governmental offers.

If ever there was a born detective, Lefevre was one. He did not look the part, except for his intelligent eyes which shone like jet beads set deep in a tanned and tight-skinned face. He had the typically Indian nose, deeply cut at the tip from frost bite received in his youthful, careless days. The rest of him was a long, lanky set of angles and corners.

He wore less clothing in winter than any other outdoor man in all of Canada. His outfit consisted of skin-tight trousers, entirely composed of buffalo hide, a jacket of similar material and a bearskin cap. Underneath he wore a complete one-piece suit of first-year buckskin, an almost air tight arrangement of his own invention. His moccasins also were of his own handiwork, water proofed with oil from some animal he often hunted on the shores of Hudson Bay.

"Keptaine Sandy?"

"Aye, Lefevre."

Pete came forward on his slinking legs, walking as if he had paws instead of feet.

"It's fonny."

"What's funny?"

"These Mistaire Boe."

“Aye?”

“He make beeg talk to lots a them in saloon tonight and they cheer heem.”

“Where?” snapped Wally.

“Thes Dago place.”

The two started forward.

“But the talk, *M’seur?’*

“Aye, Pete, what did he say?”

“Soon, very soon, Demuth return an’ all be as was before. Happy times. You no beeg ’nough to be beeg chief here, he say. Boe weel tell you things to do some time.”

A figure that up to this minute had been reclining against the door suddenly darted into the saloon.

The policemen stood there digesting the news.

“In there now?” asked the captain.

“Aye. I think so, Keptaine. I start for you when he still talkin’, but I think mebbe he go when I go—good fi’ minute ago.”

“Well, it won’t hurt to take a look inside,” said Saunders tersely. “Here we go, sergeant. Take him alive—if possible.”

“Aye, Captain. Front door?”

“Aye. We’ll let him be spectacular for the last time.”

They stepped forward, hands slipped between the clasps of their coats. Captain Saunders grasped the handle of the door. As if by prearranged signal, some one hurled a chair through a window and a second later shots were fired.

Saunders snapped the door open and a revolver went off near his face. He stepped back and slammed the door.

“By the ghost of Satan!” he muttered. “That’s a real merry party for you! Two crowds have suddenly barricaded themselves between the bar and the stove.”

“I’m dull on this one,” whispered Wally.

“Well, I suppose we’ve got to stop it,” said the captain peevishly. “Although I didn’t get a glimpse of Boe, we belong in there. But there’s nothing in my code that says walk in and not even get a chance to pop off my gun. Pete, get Corporal Henry and what he can spare. Move your carcase.”

Lefevre hesitated a moment uncertainly and then took up his inimitable dog-trot up the hill.

The saloon had become a pandemonium. Shots rang out and there were yells now and then as if some of them had gone home. Yet the sergeant and his chief stood there baffled.

“Something false here,” came the quick whisper of Saunders. “Where the —— is Boe? But they can’t get out. We’ll wait for the boys.”

Soon they caught the sound of Corporal Henry, Lefevre and three constables running down the rocky trail from the jail.

“I heard it, sir,” said Henry as he rushed up, “but I had to wait, o’ course, for orders from you. What’s orders, sir?”

“We’re seven, all told. Two outside. Five in. Tally off the two. Let ’em have it if they want it. Here we go!”

They slammed open the door and plunged in. A shot rang out as if they had pulled a string connecting the door with a gun.

“I got it,” said a trooper, cursing and stamping his foot. “Right on me —— corn!”

“Come on, get out of here! Clear this hall!” roared Saunders.

The Mounted had gone to the floor with the first shot. Inside was an unusual scene of bar room battle. Behind a barricade of tables, chairs and the stove sprawled a dozen men who fired from behind their insecure barricade. A single oil lamp, ten feet above, swinging with the vibrations of the shots, was all that lighted the room. Captain Saunders pumped three aimless shots into the bar.

“Down!” he yelled. “Down! Put ’em down, you fellows!”

A bullet clipped into the wall behind his heels. Wally retaliated with a shot into the stove. A scream, a poor imitation, they thought later, followed the report, and the shooting stopped.

“Throw ’em out,” Wally called from the floor. “Throw out them guns —— fast-like now!”

“To —— with you,” shouted a voice from the bar. A shot followed. A constable at the left of his captain answered it, and again there was a lull.

“I missed, —— me, I missed, ”muttered the constable.

Suddenly a roar came from outside.

“JAIL! Shooting!”

It was the cry of one of the outside sentinels.

Captain Saunders spoke, quietly.

“The first man who shoots toward the door will be hanged from the roof of this place tomorrow morning! You hear that? If I ever mean anything in my life I mean that!"

Rolling on his back he sent a shot into the lamp above his head. The room went black.

"The door is at my back," he said distinctly. "Now, get out of here, men, and get to the post!"

There was a scramble of many feet, muffled curses as the Mounted sought the door in the darkness. Not a shot came from the bar or the stove. Saunders and his sergeant backed out slowly and deliberately, covering their men's retreat. They brushed through the door together.

"I might have known, Wally! Boe's big trick at the jail. Here, Lefevre, stay right here as you've been. Kill 'em like rats if they come out to rush the trail. Tame 'em, I say, tame 'em!"

He was gone. Half way up the hill he caught sight of his squad running through the jail gate. Younger and faster men! He cursed and threw his greatcoat into the snow. He looked eagerly about for his sergeant and gritted his teeth in chagrin when he suddenly saw his thick legs flying into the gate a short way behind the constables.

"—— him!" he grunted. "He's got better wind!"

The shooting had long ceased at the jail yard. Captain Saunders came up panting to find all quiet and his sergeant standing near the gate with a revolver still in his hand.

"Don't tell me!" roared Saunders. "Don't tell me! I know Boe got Demuth. Did he get any of the boys, is what I want to know."

"One, not badly. Hank Jones, the cowpuncher. Once in the thigh and twice in the right arm. Them Arizonie boys was always lucky."

"The other?"

"Got him slick. Stuck him up in the barracks. Had a gun on him off the bat. Boe and eight men."

"Sensible," approved the captain. "And at least my boys have good sense—all except the cowboy. These Americans, Wally. No appreciation for a gun sticking in their bellies. Which way did Boe go?"

"Slid down the back trail."

"Get four of you sliding after him, but go only two miles. No further. He's got too much start and I don't want any ambush."

He stopped and looked wearily at Wally.

"Henry's already got four after him," said the sergeant. "I thought that was about what you would want."

"You're my other self, Wally."

They looked calmly at each other, chagrin written on their faces.

"We'll just simply admit we are asses," muttered Saunders. "Aye, Boe is spectacular—and clever. He out-thought us two to one in framing that fight down there to draw us from the jail."

"On nine to two it was up here," replied Wally.

"Numbers make little difference if a few ounces of brain are present. I realize now that only Boe's gang was in that saloon. They planned it alone. Not a citizen there except he was under Boe's banner."

He turned and took a rag from above the jail door bench and drew it through the barrel of his revolver. Sandy reached over, ripped off a piece and did the same. Then they turned without a word and went into the office where they refilled their bandoliers.

"Tomorrow," said the captain, as he seated himself at the big table and made a cigaret with papers and Wally's pouch tobacco, "Boe will be big enough with the people of Taptown to make them all criminals. His field is mighty limited, but it's fertile. Louis Riel started with not much more, and our Boe has a tongue that works at a better clip than Riel's. When his trick of tonight runs amuck tomorrow—well we are even one man less for awhile until Hank recovers."

VI

NOTICE!

Notice is hereby given to the citizens of Taptown that those who harbor Alex. Boe or Jens Demuth, wanted by the R. N. W. M. P. for murder, will be charged as accessories and punished accordingly.

No reward, immunity nor special privilege will be given for information leading to the arrests. However, if injuries are sustained by private citizens in their capture there will be full compensation to them or their relatives.

Signed—John K. Saunders,
Sup. R. N. W. M. P.

NOTICE!

To the Brave Musketeer of the Queen:

Boe and Demuth hereby give notice that they are not being harbored and that they will not be persecuted by the Mounted. Moreover, we announce we do not recognize the Mounted as dictators or despots; that the acts of the Mounted in attempting to rule free citizens are outside the rights of liberty; that we will uphold our rights with our weapons.

Signed—ALEX. BOE.

SIDE by side on the wall of Dago Jim's saloon were tacked the two hand written notices.

Captain Sandy and Sergeant Wally, standing some distance from the little crowd gathered about the notices two days after the raid on the jail, heard, or thought they heard a "loud smile" from the group.

"If that's intended for us," snarled Wally. "I'm goin' up there and bust somebody's head wide open with my fist!"

"Your idea is all right, Wally, but it wouldn't help any."

"It'd give 'em a little respect."

"For your fist, yes."

"Well, they ain't goin' to make no fool outa me!"

"They won't. But somehow I can hardly blame them for a snicker or two. Boe made asses of us, and now our notice looks rather feeble along side of his brave talk. I crave a meeting with that Boe."

"I been thinkin' 'bout that, Captain, an' I think they's only one way to make him come out. Make it a pussonable matter. Him and me, f'instance, get into gabbin' in notes till he gets pouty 'nough to come out and take a bang at me."

Saunders thought a moment. Then his eye glistened.

"By the Grand Duke's eyeglass!" he snorted. "You've hit it, Wally. Here we go!"

Another day was allowed to pass. Then:

NOTICE!

To the Weasel-faced Boe:

I declare you an insulter of the Queen—God bless her and her soldiers in So. Africa—because you made a gaol break when some of the boys is fighting for her. You're a yellow-livered sneek and a unclean skunk what don't know how to use a gun alone against one other gun. You always got a crowd. I challenge you to use 1 on me at 50 ft. sometime 6 shots each. Name your seconds. Mine is my gun.

Signed—Sgt. WALLACE STEVENS,
N. C. O., R. N. W. M. P.

Fight or run!

Captain Saunders smiled much over that notice before Wally posted it, but he let it go just as the old sergeant had written it, spelling and all. He wanted it to look original and it was. He was praying for one big play that would get Boe into the open. When the pay checks were gone Boe's work would start. But there was no trick about it. He had no doubts of the result of such a meeting. He knew too well the nerve and aim of Stevens.

As for the record of the challenge ever getting back to Regina—well they had both served well and were going into retirement some day not so far distant. Better they retire with a record of holding the upper hand in their old age than go with defeat.

Beside Boe was a murderer. They had evidence of his past and his part in the slaying that had occurred south. What difference if it were the noose or Wally's bullet? The bullet was braver than the noose at that.

The notice was soon snatched down and hurried to the mysterious hiding place of Boe, which all the endeavors of Pete Lefevre had so far failed to find. The very sound of the note was like an echo of days gone almost fifty years, yet in that little town few called it "mad."

How Boe received that note will never be known, for those who were with him make no boast of it today. No matter how it was taken, for the next morning there was his reply pinned to the wall of the Liberty.

NOTICE!

To the Brave Assistant Musketeer of the Queen:

God bless her, even if her soldiers are fighting the defenseless Boers. She doesn't know that her Dominion has police in the northwest. Your spelling is far worse than appears was necessary to make me think your note was really inspired by you.

I don't care to walk into any trap you and the captain care to set. However, don't think I refuse because I am what you claim in your note. Or think anything you want—until tonight. Get out your guns and send to Regina for help.

I fight, you run.

Signed—BOE.

Wally and the chief read it together.

"Get Pete," said Saunders. "Bring him to headquarters."

The scout pushed the door partly open noiselessly ten minutes later and eased his thin body through like a cat between boxes in a storeroom mouse-hunt.

"Keptaine Sandy."

"Aye, Pete. Where is Boe?"

The scout shrugged his shoulders and his face was solemn.

"This not like easy," he said. "Everybody know me now. Not like work I used to, Keptaine. They no talk when I near."

"Find him, Pete. We must know."

"From Blackfoot girl I get she hear plan he come visit tonight here."

"So his note intimates," replied Saunders. "Um-m. Well, Pete, just ease up the search until tomorrow unless you fall upon something. I think he will keep his promise to try something tonight, and perhaps it is a visit."

At seven o'clock that night Captain Saunders and his sergeant were having a snack in the captain's room.

"There is only one path up here since last night's heavy fall," said Saunders.

"There is that little plateau half way down," said Stevens, "with that single path up to it. An' I think it is worth waitin' in the cold to give him a —— hot reception party right there."

Twenty minutes after finishing supper they set off down the trail toward town. Five hundred yards from the gate they stopped and seated themselves. Wrapping their greatcoats about them and snuggling their feet into blankets they had brought, they sat in the darkness to wait.

Below and above the plateau stretched a rocky climb that wound along a narrow cliff. The little flattened area was a pocket in the mountain, surrounded with its steep rocks on all sides but one, where it fell into black space. Below this cliff were the tops of balsam, fir and pine, laden now with weights of snow.

"It's a tight corner to walk into," whispered the captain. "Once a chap gets into this he can only get out by a slow climb back—or jump over the cliff."

"Either is going to be bad for this Boe," put in Stevens.

THEY had waited almost an hour when they heard the peculiar sound of moccasins on chinooked snow. Lefevre had been ordered to remain at the jail. They wanted no interference or tragic mistakes this night.

"Four feet!"

"The lights of the jail make an outline if we stand," whispered the sergeant.

They waited a second and then moved on hands and knees into a lower position. They were facing down the plateau and away from the jail.

"This is going to be a messy thing," muttered Saunders. "They'll have us backed into a corner just as soon as they step upon this clearing—and we'll have them in the same position."

"Just what we've wanted, sir," murmured the sergeant, suddenly official, now that real business was at hand. "Now if it's Boe, he can run or fight."

A soft patter on their shoulders told them it had begun to snow hard again, and there was the peculiar dull glow of a night storm in the north. Captain Saunders, knowing the white sheet on which they lay would reveal them even in the intense darkness, decided to rush the meeting.

"Who's there?" he demanded evenly as the two figures came full upon the plateau.

There was a halt and a sudden start of panic on the part of the big figure. The other, like a trained soldier, went to his right knee at the instant the captain spoke. The big fellow, just a grotesque moving shadow, turned to run.

"Demuth, you ——!"

At the call of his master's voice, Demuth stopped like a chided dog.

"Who's there?" repeated the stern voice of the captain.

"Well, who are you?"

"Captain Saunders."

"That sergeant there too?"

"Aye," called Wally.

"Well, then this is Boe," came the defiant answer.

"We want you, as you well know, Boe," said the captain. "Best put up your hands and come forward."

There was a short laugh.

Revolvers in the hands of Boe suddenly spoke. At the shots, they saw Demuth again turn to flee.

"—— you, Jens. I'll pump you in the back!" came a snarl from where Boe had fallen in the snow.

Demuth turned and fell upon his face beside his companion. Crouching, silent, as if fascinated by the strange actions of the pair before them, the policemen saw distinctly Demuth's shaking arm lift and a flame spit forward from his revolver.

Then, as if the sound of his own gun had given him courage, Demuth lifted himself upon his knees. Again his gun spoke.

The flash and the spurt of snow the bullet threw in his face brought Saunders into action. He sought direction instinctively and fanned four of his six shots almost in the fraction of a second and was prone with the last shot.

Demuth screamed, clutched once at his throat and then throwing his arm across his face, tossed himself in a heap like a rugby player diving for interference.

Boe flung two shots at the flash of the captain's gun, but was too late. He only gave Wally something to guide his aim. The sergeant sent out three shots in the time it took him to thrust out his arm and bring it back. It had taken Wally twenty years to rehearse that movement to perfection.

There was a silence, but it was obvious to the police that the sergeant had missed. There was nothing to guide the aim now. Shooting at a flame that went out almost too quickly for the eye to catch it—that was what the battle in the darkness had become.

They heard a groan but knew it was not from Boe. That spectacular gentleman had lived long because he did not make the mistake of being a fraction of an instant too far behind his last shot when he dived to either side. He had used it several times before when fleeing near the border in the Rockies, and it had won opportunity there for escape.

Snow was falling now as if some giant were using a great shovel above them.

The police, using very old but still efficient tactics, had separated for the time when flanking would be possible. They both sensed without exchanging words that Demuth was down and sorely wounded, perhaps out of the game for all time. Then it was the trick of the next move to keep Boe from gaining that trail down toward town.

No shots came now. Each side was waiting for the other to disclose position and both were too experienced in this peculiar guerrilla warfare to make the first move. Wally began to snake his way toward the lower trail.

"It's blindin'," he muttered to himself. "Can't get too far 'way from the chief, or we'll plug each other. But the captain will be crawlin' like me."

Boe sensed their movements at the same time that he realized Demuth was down for good. He was afraid to call to his man. If the big fool couldn't take care of himself against a couple of aged policemen, then let him suffer.

He began to back away. But Wally was coming too fast. Boe caught the motion of the sergeant somewhere behind a snow laden rock and in his eagerness fired too hastily. It gave Captain Saunders a chance from the other side.

Boe muttered a curse as a bullet plowed into his shoulder. Too late. He must fight it out. He reared up like a phantom and flung wild shots in all directions.

Wally fired at close range. He missed. It was so dark he could only sense where Boe was.

"No! No!" yelled the captain. "No, Wally. Jump him!"

But Wally was not close enough and he wasn't sure of where Boe was, either. There was a moment's hesitation until the firing abruptly stopped and the click of an empty revolver came.

Then they both sprang forward. Boe staggered blindly toward the trail where suddenly the sergeant loomed at him. He swerved away toward the cliff.

"Stop him! Stop him!" yelled the captain.

Boe rushed on, his uncertain feet sending flying clods of snow before him. At the edge of the cliff he turned and flung his useless guns back toward the charging figures.

Then in one wild leap he was over the cliff.

They glimpsed the dark form double in the air, and a fraction of a second later heard him strike a tree and tumble amidst a fall of snow lumps into the blackness below.

"He's killed," said Sandy.

"I think so. He must of got a couple of our shots somewheres in him."

They turned to Demuth. He was dead. A bullet had found his throat.

Down the rocky and slippery path they raced to find Boe. Shouts had come from the jail. Now the sound of pattering feet followed them. They had to feel their way down the treacherous trail. Corporal Henry shouted from above. They answered.

"You a'right, sir?"

"Aye. Shake a carcase down here. Boe dead somewheres."

Excited calls came. Soon the men became darting forms on the white ground below the cliff. Lanterns shone.

"He jumped the cliff with a half dozen shots in him," called the sergeant. "He'll be in a heap somewheres. Watch out he ain't still ready to shoot."

They searched long, winding in and out of the trees.

Two hours later they trekked back up the hill, angry and disappointed. They could find no trace of Boe.

VII

THE morning search for Boe added little to that of the night before except that at the top of the rocky climb to the plateau a constable found a bottle of phosphorus in oil and a few brooms with the handles gone. In the clothing of Demuth were many matches.

"The burning of the jail would have certainly been a spectacular stunt," said the captain. "With the water in the barrels frozen tight, his rockets would have cost us dearly if thrown on the lee side of the chimneys. I suppose it was there he expected to strike portions of the roof without snow."

Below the cliff they found where Boe had struck upon a bank of snow. There were many footprints there, but it was impossible to tell whose they were since the aimless search of the constables the night before.

The routine of the jail went back to normal. A thorough search of the dwellings had failed to disclose the wounded Boe. But Boe, if not dead, was out of the way for many weeks to come, and during those weeks Captain Saunders had many plans he expected to use to keep the little town in order with his small force.

VIII

"FIRE!"

Captain Saunders stirred sleepily on the little office bed. He thrust his elbow into the pillow and raised his head into the cold darkness. He judged it was about three A.M. Some one was running along the board path with only one boot on.

"Fire!"

Saunders leaped to meet Corporal Henry who had punched open the office door.

"Big blaze in town, sir. Looks like the entire row. Sergeant Stevens gone down there."

"Two men here enough. No prisoners. The rest below."

"Aye, sir."

The corporal, placing his foot on a chair, drew on the boot he had been carrying in his hand.

"Speed your carcase a bit, Corporal."

"Aye, sir. Sergeant Stevens anticipated your orders. They are already on their way down there."

The superintendent swore softly.

"I don't usually sleep hard as this," he complained. Then in a burst of anger, "Who the —— yelled 'fire!' "

"One of the boys goin' out with the sergeant. Excited."

"Excited! Well, so am I," snapped the captain, as he pulled on his breeches. "If the town goes— My ——!"

"Nothin' much to fight with, sir—"

"Nothing at all to fight with. ——! Louie Cohen's store had three-fourths the food supply of the whole town. Got to that?"

"Can't tell," murmured the corporal, scratching a frost glaze off the window with his pocket knife.

Captain Saunders began wrapping himself in his greatcoat.

"Watch sharp, you two. Danger not here, but if anything occurs I'll back you to the limit if you have to shoot. Forget our friend Boe. He didn't do this. He's too badly hurt."

He flung himself out the door. From the hill he saw one of the strangest sights of his career—a huge blaze, a town afire in a snow storm. In the flare below he could see a mob milling about in helpless confusion. Shouts came to him above the crackling of the flames as he passed the plateau.

Thoughts flashed through his mind in a conflicting and confusing array. What if that crazy, ramshackle, wooden town burned to the last stick? It was a big fire, right in the heart of the row. Saloon leaned on saloon, store on store, shack on shack. The only fire break was a fifty foot street. Locked away from the nearest town by forty miles of impossible, snow-clodded trail, this Taptown would become Madtown.

Just before he went into the plateau's level, he saw by a myriad of sudden sparks and a following burst of flame that the roof of Dago Jim Poechini's had given way. He muttered a silent prayer for the girls who roomed there, and dug his cleats into the ice with renewed fury.

As he emerged from the plateau and began to descend the last stretch of path he confirmed his early fears that the town was doomed. The "avenue de l'enfer" was true to its nickname at last. From the deserted company office on the nearest approach to the rooming bunk-house on the end, a mass of flame reached above to one solid mountain of smoke.

The general store of Cohen stood next to the Poechini saloon. It was the center now of the conflagration—a blazing cave.

Saunders groaned aloud when he saw the flaming store. The fire must have started near there and that meant there had been little time, or perhaps no time, to save food—suddenly precious beyond the worth of gold.

More than one hundred persons in town, no way in or out and the main stock of foodstuffs gone. What of these rough fellows when they faced starvation? What when they found no shelter from the terrible cold? Cold, hunger, empty hands, crime—that was the progression which leaped into the superintendent's mind.

As Saunders ran into town, a smoking hut across from Cohen's burst into flame as if it had been sprayed earlier with gasoline. There was a concerted shout of dismay from the mob when it was dazed by the sudden leap of the flame.

Saunders saw his sergeant vainly attempting to organize a bucket brigade from the stream at the end of the street. Some one had broken the ice with an axe. With a shortage of buckets and those conscripted continually breaking away from the line on the blind chance that something might yet be saved from their rooms, Wally was having a difficult time. A man sprawled on his side in the snow at the feet of the sergeant and Wally was shaking his fist at him and telling him there was more in that fist if the fellow wanted it.

In the midst of his efforts, a man overreached with his bucket and fell into the hole. The entire line broke to rescue him—and the fire leaped across the "avenue" to another shack.

A mob of dogs of all descriptions was running madly about, getting in the way and adding to the uproar with raucous barks. Some one kicked a dog from his path and the animal turned and buried his fangs in the man's legs. A yell from the attacked brought the owner of the dog. Heated words. Fists swung suddenly. Some one rushed in.

"Stop, boys! Get in and work. Use that energy—"

One pulled a gun. A shot. A body dropped.

"Hold him!" yelled Saunders.

The man swung around and his gun blazed again. He was blind with rage and he missed.

Captain Saunders drew and shot him through the arm.

"This is martial law," he shouted. "Captain Saunders speaking! Captain Saunders speaking! Martial law! You understand! Martial law!"

There was an angry murmur from one man standing near, but it died away as the captain swung toward him.

"Take both of them out of here. Up there under the trees. Wrap them up in blankets. Neither dead by a long shot. Do it now. Speed up your carcases. We'll try him tomorrow."

He turned and saw two others fighting over possession of a half burned mattress. Captain Saunders yelled to his sergeant, working on the line near them.

"Stop those men. Put them into the fight against this fire; if they want trouble, let them have it!"

Wally turned and saw the pointing finger of his chief. He dropped his bucket and leaped upon both men with his fists. The sudden attack sent both men sprawling upon their backs. They got up dazed to look into the eyes of the husky policeman who was looking for more trouble. They glared at him and went back to the bucket line, swearing at each other viciously as they handled buckets.

"Take it, you ——!"

"Gimme it, you ——, and shut your —— face!"

Saunders saw all his constables and the sergeant on the bucket line.

"Everybody out?" he yelled to Wally.

WALLY screamed back that he thought so, without stopping his work. The superintendent dashed away to make sure. Before the tool shack of the railroad company he found Dick Flitton attempting to organize a gang. Saunders had watched the big Southerner much since Wally had made the first report on him. He and Wally had become very good friends and the boy had been occasionally to the post.

"Why doesn't a big chap like you help at the stores?" the captain asked him angrily.

Flitton turned sharply and saw the distinctive trousers and fur cap.

"They're lost," he snapped. "Why try to save something already gone?"

The snow, loosened by the heat, had slid from the shack's roof a few minutes before, revealing now a roof steaming and showered by sparks. It was Mr. Tam's residence and also the tool house.

"Anyone inside?" asked the captain.

"Sick girl."

"Aye? Then what you waiting for? Go get her."

"She's getting wrapped up," said the boy laconically. Then he added: "Even with the roof about on fire. Some girl that."

"Well, I'm old enough to be the grandfather of Jack Tam's girl," said Saunders, "and if she isn't dressed enough now you can leave and see her at the post when she is. Now, run along."

He started in. Flitton grasped his sleeve.

"Good for you. I want them out —— bad."

"Aye. Tam ought to have more sense."

"But I want to save the tools, and the crowd here can't if she doesn't hurry and get presentable soon."

"Tools?"

"Yes. The town must be rebuilt, you know."

Captain Saunders turned at the words, went back to the boy and grasped his shoulders.

"You're all right, boy. For a dozen more like you!"

He dashed into the shack.

Laura Tam, ill since she had come into the cold North with her father, was being worked tenderly into a coat when Saunders rushed in.

"Get out," the superintendent snapped. "What's the meaning of holding up the rescue of all these tools?"

"The tools be ——!" said Tam politely. "It's the girl. Where can I take her? Pneumonia. Just getting over it."

"You know where the post is, Mr. Tam. Now get out of here."

With the girl leaning heavily upon him, Tam went out, and Flitton rushed in. He stopped to whisper a few words to her. She smiled at him and put her hand on his shoulder for a brief instant.

"You be careful of yourself," she whispered.

Flitton fell to work with his gang. Saunders saw him first of all empty the girl's crude dressing table drawers into a sheet and hand it out a window. Others had started a general ransacking of the tools.

"I saw you put a picture inside your coat," said Saunders, as he started out. "I won't stand for pilfering, you understand, of course."

"Yes, sir," replied the boy, buttoning up his coat.

"Well, see it doesn't happen again. And don't forget the tools."

Outside the flames held full control. As Saunders ran up the street he looked back toward Tam's shack and saw a spray of fire run up the roof. It was the last house. Nothing was to be saved. Every last stick of wood in Taptown would go; the jail on the hill was only saved by the direction of the wind.

If there had been confusion and wild disorder when the fire broke out, there was pandemonium now. As roof after roof crashed in, an incubus of despair began to hover over the crowd. Dire threats against the one whose carelessness had started the conflagration were spoken with a string of oaths, but no one seemed to know who, if any one, was the careless party—and oaths turned into helpless fear of the future.

A dozen fights were in progress. All of them had started over alleged ownership of clothing, which lay in heaps beyond the fire's reach. The Mounted had long given up hope of doing anything with its bucket brigade and were busy keeping some semblance of order. There were a few also who had to be restrained from taking foolish chances over something forgotten in the first mad rushes for the outside.

"Oh, let these —— fools fight," said Saunders savagely to his sergeant. "We can't spend all our time stopping them. We have other things to do."

Looking over the fire, Saunders and Stevens shed no tears for the going of Poechini's and its supply of liquor.

"One blessing at least," said the captain.

Before he could answer, Stevens was forced to turn away and aid Sam Ying, local restaurateur, in the removal of a parrot, two canaries, a litter of mongrels and a pen of chickens, all the Chinaman had evidently cared to save. Sam moaned bitterly over the fact that one of the canaries appeared about to die.

"On'y one sing," he wailed dismally.

Stevens lifted a cape, apparently dropped by one of the dance hall girls, and gave it to Sam to cover the cages and the litter. Sam stacked his possessions together, threw the cape over the lot and knelt there crooning a quaint Oriental song.

An hour later when Stevens passed again, he found Sam in high spirits.

"Him sing 'gain! Woopee!"

Taptown, builded without hope of brilliant future or even that the C. P. R. would place a flag station there, was crumbling ashes in two short hours. Taptown went back to dust as its grayest dawn came over the mountains.

IX

CAPTAIN SAUNDERS, when all hope for the safety of the last building was gone, sought out Flitton and his tools. Across the stream he assembled those who had courage temporarily to forget their plight, and threw up a square roof of bows between standing trees. Balsam and fir branches were piled on top and under sheets of corrugated iron from the ruins; fires were started in the four corners. There at last the entire town assembled to talk it over.

With keen disappointment, Stevens and Saunders surveyed the gathering and saw that Boe was not there. Perhaps he had lain wounded and helpless in some little shack and perished alone. If not—and of this they were fairly sure since the unsuccessful hunt of Lefevre—he was hiding in some place a short distance from town. It sounded impossible, but there seemed nothing impossible to Boe.

But Lefevre had gone away two days ago on a mysterious hunt. The police knew he had his nose on a keen trail.

The snow had been shoveled away by the time Sam Ying, with the aid of half a dozen younger men, had been able to build a rock oven and make a breakfast from some of the small amount of food saved from the rooming-house kitchen.

The captain, standing in the center of the four fires, watched the men marching past Sam's big buckets of mush and coffee. They had pieces of blackened tin of all descriptions for plates and cups. After there was something put into them would be the best time for a talk, he thought. He blessed Heaven for Sam.

Outside the crude shelter were several good-sized fires, where cooked all sorts of odd breakfast dishes.

Flocked together in one corner, and apparently deeply worried for the first time in their lives, were the five girls from the dance hall. They had saved little, but already they had more blankets than they had ever enjoyed before. The only other woman sat nursing a baby in sacred dignity at the other end from the girls. She too had more clothing and blankets than she had ever possessed before. At her feet burned a small fire. Her husband stood helplessly by, his chin sticking out and his jaw set.

Captain Saunders turned and, at a movement in the gathering about him, saw her for the first time.

"Here, you," he called to her husband, as he strode up, "what do you mean having your wife here?"

"Well, I'll be —— if I can see any better place," snapped the husband.

"Well, just look up the hill," said Saunders. "Now, you fellows hanging around here haven't much to do. Get this woman and all of her stuff up to the post. Report to Corporal Henry that she is to have the office."

The captain took the child in his arms while the mother gathered her things.

"Good husky lad," he said in way of conversation. "My, my, how he can yap. He ought to make the finest premier of Canada some day."

"Or join the Mounted," said some one.

"Or be a big general," stated another.

"*She's* going to be a school teacher," said the mother laughing, as she gathered up her daughter.

The captain laughed so loudly that every face in the enclosure turned suddenly toward him. These were the first laughs that gathering had heard in many hours and somehow they at first seemed a sacrilege. There were scowls that changed slowly into smiles. Captain Saunders, quick to take advantage of every opportunity to ease the tension, went about telling the story on himself.

At last the scanty breakfast was finished, and as the captain stood in the center of the shelter, Sergeant Stevens cupped his hands and called for attention.

"I'm taking command here," said the superintendent, "because there is no other authorized power. There has never been a mayor or any other public official in this town. If there were any other officer I would gladly step aside. Taptown hasn't had a long life so far. It was not really a town at all. Just a site for the railroad tap.

"I don't want to have a lot of excitement grow out of what I say, but I must tell you that we are in a desperate situation unless all pull together, let enmity die and become friends.

"We have been somewhat rough, my friends, but after all we are not mollycoddles here, and I must say I have never seen men take punishment with a smile as you fellows have done. Most of you, at least, have led severe, outdoor lives, making your living by the very fact of your hardness, and there is no reason you should fail now that you are faced with responsibilities.

"The trails are closed, as you know. I'm not going to send any one along the trail to try to make a go of it. They couldn't get through to the railroad and I refuse to let them die trying it. It is not necessary. Nothing could come of it if any one did get through. There is no help down there to send us.

"I am telling you just what I think, knowing you are men enough to take it.

"You must pull together. The Mounted are here to help. We will take a firm hand only because we must, but there will be much leeway.

"As far as I can estimate about three-fourths of our food is gone. But that doesn't mean that we will starve by a long shot. Some of you will go out and see what sort of hunters you are. The others will play as cooks, dish washers and carpenters.

"This is going to be the best lesson you could ever receive in good citizenship. Whether you are from across the border or Canada makes no difference. We are to be citizens of Taptown for at least three more months.

"There isn't enough room in here for you men if you stood up all night. Therefore, I can recommend only one thing. That is the immediate rebuilding of town. We will put it on an equal basis. There will be nothing sold. Every sack of flour, every rabbit shot will belong to all. We're going to try our own little system of government. I guess you can stand it a few months. The government will make reparation in all cases where loss results from this system.

"The tools are piled up outside. Mr. Flitton is hereby appointed foreman. Let's put a little speed into those carcases, gentlemen."

Silence followed the end of the announcement.

Suddenly a sullen voice came from back of the crowd.

"Who's goin' ta have charge o' the grub?"

Another man jumped to his feet.

"Suppose somme-body wid a gun. We got hooman rights, mebbe we have."

It was Dago Jim Poechini.

"Well," snapped another voice, "if you ain't satisfied with the way the captain intends doin' things, you can start down the trail any time."

Saunders thought it sounded much like little Cohen, who had lost his entire fortune of general merchandise—sans insurance.

X

UNDER the canopy of fallen fir and balsam the homeless slept that night, huddled in their blankets and greatcoats, tired from the first day of real manual labor they had done in many days. There were many aching muscles, but most of the men were of the sturdy stock that build railroads, and they slept like bears.

The women now were all up the hill making the best of it in the wooden cots of the deposed constables, who snored now in a corner of the shelter. They were taking four-hour shifts at keeping the fire going.

Sergeant Wally's room was occupied by Miss Laura Tam, while her devoted father slept outside her door on a canvas cot with a revolver under his pillow. The captain's room had become a nursery. The dance hall girls found the barrack room a happy home.

The two officers were slumped in chairs in the cook-house, talking, smoking and occasionally swearing.

"Well, Wally, we're in a —— of a fix, if you will pardon the coarseness of my language."

"Aye, Sandy. Is there any more tea under that cozy?"

"You drink a lot of tea, Wally."

"You've had six cups yourself," protested Wally. "Besides, what did we drink the Queen's health in on her birthday? God bless her! Tea!"

"Well, as I said before, we're in a —— of a fix," snapped the captain, handing over the blackened pot.

Wally filled the captain's cup, too.

"Now that we are happy again," said Saunders, "let me tell you that Lefevre is back with a line on our friend Boe. He's somewhere in an old shack in a little group not far away. Seems the shacks were a sort of trappers' village in years back. The fur is gone mostly now. There is Boe. He was carried there by a few of his followers who were coming up behind him when he came that night to burn the jail. They ran at the first shots—lucky, perhaps, for us—and were waiting down below for the outcome. The outcome was Boe falling over the cliff, and somehow they got there before we did and packed him away."

"An' who is this gang?"

"Dago Jim and his outfit, of course."

"You sure?"

"Well, pretty sure. You know his type. He lived by lawlessness. The more there was, the more money he made in his dump. He ran the rottenest place since the Yukon. But I pick him not only because Pete has a pretty good line on him but because he snapped up so at me at the end of my little talk today down below. He was right there with disturbance."

"Aye. If he could—working overtime here now he would run the town of course, Sandy. You know—say, I just thought—he always kept his liquor underground at the rear of his place. Buried. If he could open up again, he'd be able to dig it up and get the last cent in town."

"Yes, and bury half the town in the hole he took the liquor from. Well, there must be an amusement hall rebuilt, Wally. A big one where all the lads can gavotte. The girls can go back there and dance their fool heads off. It will be safer to have an outlet for the spirits. But it won't be Dago Jim's if I can help it. It will be little Cohen's—and there won't be any booze sold."

"An' Boe—"

"Well, Wally, tell me I'm a fool. I don't care from an old friend like you. But I want to let him stay right where he is. You know, I'm now averse to getting him with a gun. That fellow sort of pricks my ambition to beat him at his own game. I have a plan for him, which I am going to outline to you just as soon as it gets cooked properly in my mind. But I think I will let him stay put and get well and come back."

"Heaven help the little mounted sojers wot ain't even got hosses up here!" ejaculated Wally.

"Well, Wally, Boe is something of a leader. You know what I mean. And besides, I think you will say he showed real nerve during the fight on the plateau."

"I know what you mean, Sandy. One of them dashed fellas with a loose-hinged tongue and a knack of wantin' to be king. Like the Frencher we licked at Waterloo."

"I hope he's not a Napoleon, Wally, because I'm no Wellington. But we're going to lick that fellow, Wally. Lick him to a well baked hot-cake. He's not going to be bloody, but he is going to be bowed."

"Not bloody?" questioned the matter of fact sergeant. "How you goin' to lick a fella like him without makin' a rare, juicy steak outa him?"

"Wally, Lefevre has discovered he's got half the town in sympathy with him and a very neat old shack at Goosenest with five men there. They're his gang, his henchmen, his slaves—anything you want to call them."

"Goosenest! Why I ain't never heard of it; have you?"

"No, but it's a small lake not five miles away and there's sort of a trail there after you get out a ways. Boe had this place all the time. It's a place one would never go to for any reason—except that of Boe. It's so long ago that the trappers lived there that no one ever thought of it. In fact, there is no one in this town who knew of its existence. One or two of our hunters may have fallen upon it, but if so they said nothing."

"But Boe is there, Sandy, with five men. I can't see why you let him stay. Aye! Get him and end it. Let's say, 'Here we go!' Eh, Captain?"

"No, Wally. Discretion. Listen to me. They are practically fortified there. Do you think I'm going to have my boys killed to get them? Not on your red nose, Wally.

"I'm a captain, Wally. My business is to take care of the lives of my men, just as much as it is to get wanted men. Why should my men die to kill a man who can't get away for months? I ask you, —— it, I ask you.

"Pete tells me that shack is in an open space and well watched. You think I'm going there and have my men killed when my man is already in prison. Do you think I'm crazy, or—"

There came a short silence, while the captain's eyes bored into those of his sergeant.

"Or that I'm afraid!"

Wally looked back into his eye.

"Shame!" he roared. "Shame, to ask me that!"

His eyes suddenly fell away from his captain's face. He was trembling.

Saunders rushed across to him and placed both hands on his shoulders.

"Wally," he said, "I'm ashamed. Forgive me. I'm a fool. I didn't mean to hurt, Wally. I'm —— tired. What a fool I am to rave like this!"

Wally lifted his eyes and suddenly the creases in their corners went deep.

"'S'right, Sandy. But you mustn't think I'd believe you a coward."

Their hands met and they laughed foolishly.

"We've got our hands full now," went on the captain, standing by the sergeant's chair. "This homeless crowd means —— in the dead of winter. They'll just burn the snow off the ground if we let them alone for a day.

"No, I'm not going after Boe. I'm going after education for this crowd. This will probably be my last big job for the Mounted, Wally. Perhaps for both of us. We're not what you might call babes any more. They'll send us to pasture soon. I want to go out of here with Boe a fallen hero headed for the gallows, a crowd of new, clean men in Taptown and everyone of my men alive. That would be a record to be proud of, the record I want to end my career with.

"Boe is coming to us and, when he does, it will be crawling on his belly like a one-legged dog."

Wally smiled again.

"Well, laugh all you want to, you bowl of sour soup."

"Then give me an idear!"

"Wait till I drag up a chair."

They talked until dawn, and when Wally started to leave to go to his men below, he put his big arm over the captain's shoulder and stood there looking down upon the weary face.

"Aye, captain," he whispered. "Aye."

XI

"HEAR ye! Hear ye!" shouted Corporal Henry.

"Let the prisoner step forward, Sergeant Stevens."

Sitting before a crude table under the canopy, and surrounded by the entire citizenry of smouldering Taptown, Superintendent Saunders leaned against a supporting post, shuffling commitment papers before him.

Sergeant Stevens came forward from the crowd, his hand resting easily upon the shoulder of a slouching figure.

"José Cabranni, sir." he reported.

"Assault to murder," said the captain, lifting a paper before him. "José Cabranni, you are charged with shooting one John Philip Fanen during a fight December third. You will have opportunity to defend yourself as before any court in the land. Since there is no councillor in Taptown, you may select anyone you desire to plead your case, or you may do so yourself. You will listen to the reading of the information:

> "It is hereby alleged that José Cabranni, a citizen of the community of Taptown, contrary to the laws of the Dominion of Canada, on the third day of December, 1899, wilfully, malicıously and with intent to murder did shoot one John Philip Fanen during a disagreement over a dog, and while the said community of Taptown was in flames. I hereby signify that the contents of this information are prepared and sworn to before me by Sergeant Wallace Stevens, N. C. O. R. N. W. M. P., and are true and correct to the best of my belief.
>
> CAPTAIN JOHN K. SAUNDERS, R. N. W. M. P.
> Superintendent Upper Battleford District."

"What is your plea, Mr. Cabranni? Guilty or not guilty?"

"I dunno," whispered the prisoner, as he hung his head and kicked the scraped earth before him. "I dunno. I didn't mean to shoot tha fella."

"Come! Guilty or not guilty?"

The prisoner shrugged his shoulders and his mittens trembled as he twined his fingers at his breast.

"I dunno. The derg bit me an' I got —— mad, and then this fella jumped me an'—"

"We are not asking for testimony, Mr.

Cabranni," interrupted the captain. "You will have an opportunity for that later, if you want to plead not guilty and stand trial."

The wretched figure stood fidgeting there, his hands groping as if for a supporting post. Sergeant Stevens gripped his arm.

"Be a man," he whispered to him. "Don't fall down."

But the prisoner swayed and leaned heavily on the sergeant.

"Someone bring him that short log," said the captain. "Put it up on end. Let him sit on it."

Ten eager hands rushed forward and brought the prisoner the stool. Captain Saunders began to speak in a soft tone.

"You are charged with a serious offense, Mr. Cabranni. There may be certain mitigating circumstances of this case. I suggest you make a plea and let us hear this case."

"I shot him," said the prisoner.

"Then you plead guilty?"

Cabranni nodded.

"Arraign the prisoner, sergeant."

Stevens stepped forward, again read the information and asked Cabranni if he pleaded guilty. There was the silent nodding of the head while the crowd watched breathlessly to hear the captain's next words.

"Cabranni," said the court, "you come from Italy where hot tempers are often the commonest characteristic of the people. I know you have not been in this country long, that you do not fully understand our ways. But, Cabranni, there is no such thing as race when a town in the wilderness burns to the ground. We are only men now and must play the game as such.

"I could put you before a jury, but I am a judge. I have been years in this work. I am capable of judging. Sitting here I can see just why you shot this man. There was a great fire. You had lost everything. You were frantic, panic stricken—like so many of us. It came to you, this trouble, in a moment when tempers were flaring like the fire before us.

"But you are ready, Cabranni, to say you shot this man. Are you ready also to pay the penalty?"

"I ready," murmured Cabranni. "I go to jail. I sorry. I help this fella get well mebbe."

Captain Saunders pondered for some minutes. The crowd had pressed forward, eagerly awaiting the words that were to send this man to Regina and the penitentiary.

Suddenly a movement behind the crowd.

"Just a minute here; just a minute!"

A figure pressed through and stood before the court.

"I have just come in here," said the man. "I want to defend this man. I feel he should have a trial, go before a jury."

"He has already pleaded guilty," snapped the captain. "There will be no further trial."

"Then this is utter injustice. It is what we are to expect in the coming months. A man has the right of defending his own liberty—no matter what the Mounted might think about it."

"Who are you?" asked the captain.

"I'm John Hansen. I'm not a lawyer, but I know enough to offer aid."

"For whom?"

"Myself."

"And who else?"

Hansen stopped short and brought his keen eyes to those of Saunders.

"Why," he said slowly, "myself, I said."

Suddenly Saunders saw just what this meant. Hansen. Yes, he was one of those named by Lefevre as a member of the gang that went to Boe's shack. He was there under orders. Here to protest against a legal action, to put a wrong face, in other words, on anything the Mounted might do. Well, there was something behind this, something planned that the captain didn't mean to let succeed.

"This man pleaded guilty," the court said sternly, "after he had been given plenty of time to make up his decision. I will not go outside the law for any one. Please step aside, Mr. Hansen."

"I'll step aside nothing," roared Hansen. "If there is to be no liberty here we'd like to know it right now."

He swung around toward the crowd.

Time to put an end to this, thought the captain.

"Sergeant Stevens, put that man under arrest for contempt of court. Corporal Henry, take him immediately to the post!"

Stevens stepped forward from the side of the prisoner and swung the man around. Before the crowd he held both of the man's hands in one of his and searched him. With a flourish that all the crowd might see he suddenly yanked a gun from his hip pocket and held it above his head.

"Put an additional charge of carrying a concealed weapon against him!" roared the court.

They marched him out, Corporal Henry's hand over the prisoner's mouth.

"Now," continued the captain, "please stand up, Mr. Cabranni.

"On a pile of blankets back there in a corner is the man you shot. He is not very badly hurt, thanks to your raging temper that blinded your eye. We started work earlier today on the first building of the new Taptown. We will call it a hospital. I think it will take Mr. Fanen about five weeks to fully recover. During that time you will see that he is comfortable, that he is taken care of in every want. The man you shot in a fit of temper will be your patient. That is your sentence. Go back there and shake hands with him and later we will get him to the post until the new building is done. Go back there. He is waiting for you."

The prisoner stood watching the face of the captain for almost a minute.

"I don't go jail?" he whispered.

But Captain Saunders was already climbing from the "bench."

"Listen, you," snapped Stevens. "You've got to nurse this wounded fella till he's better. Go do it and forget everything but that Captain Saunders is the best guy in the world to you."

XII

TWO days later Captain Saunders, working with his new civilian lieutenant, Flitton, had drawn up a plan of the new town and the men were well at work. Flitton was a great help. After much clever questioning that followed some fatherly interest by Saunders, the young southerner had admitted that he was a civil engineer by profession who had let a hot temper and some mint juleps put him in disgrace with his family. The escapade had not been very serious and it was Flitton's pride that had driven him into the North until he could answer his father's demand that he make a man of himself.

Flitton's enthusiam carried him into desiring a park in the center of the new town, but the place was too hilly, and at last he gave way and approved plans that called for a square little log-cabin town with a small flagpole standing in the center. The big amusement hall was to be built in the very center of the two rows that were now to have an eighty-foot street between them.

"That dance hall should be one of the first built," said the captain at the last conference on the plans. "The men must have amusement. We'll let 'em go to it; the girls will dance, the band will play—if it can find any instruments—and there will be no booze sold. What do you think of that? No booze in Taptown. Great tragedy, is it not?"

"Who's joint is this going to be?" asked Flitton.

"That is the question," replied the captain. "But one thing sure, it is not going to be Dago Jim's."

"But he will demand it. He had the biggest place here, and how are you going to stop him from opening a legitimate place?"

"Well, permits will be given by the city council when this place is built as much as we need it for the winter. That is all we are going to undertake, enough to have comfort for the winter. After that, the town will have to shift for itself as it did before the fire."

"This is news about a city council," said the boy. "First time I ever heard this town had any officers."

"It hasn't had, of course, but it will have. Listen to me. I'm going to teach this gang what it is to be citizens of a country. We're going to have all of them, mayor, councilmen, clerk, judge—everything you could desire. These fellows are going to learn for the first time in their lives that it is a lot of fun to be citizens with a vote. Most of them have never voted in their lives or taken any interest in civic affairs. Most of them are on the go from one end of the year to the other looking for work, or playing around spending their money. Before I get through with them a lot are going back to their home towns, marry, settle down and go around telling their neighbors what a wonderful thing children are."

"You're not an old soldier," said Flitton with conviction, "You're a diplomat."

"You're going to find yourself in their shoes, young fellow, before you know it. Perhaps, also, if plans go right, you'll find yourself a mayor of the craziest town you were ever in."

Flitton laughed.

"Well, I don't care about being a politician," he said. "But the first part of it, running around talking about my children maybe will suit me better some day."

"A-hum," murmured the captain. "So. What does Mr. Tam say?"

"You're quite a way ahead of me," said the boy. "I haven't got that far yet."

"Well, if you are shy about it, I'll drop in and see him in the next door and play John Alden for you."

They laughed.

"I wouldn't take a chance with you," said Flitton. "Miles Standish didn't fare very well, you'll remember. You with your experience, uniform and all that. No thanks. I'll go myself."

"Well, go," snapped the captain. "Nobody will cheer harder for you than I will. Better do it soon. The young lady is just recovering from a long illness and hasn't much resistance just now."

They turned back with a laugh to their plans and soon were putting finishing touches on the town that was to be.

"There is really no use being arbitrary about the plans," said the captain. "You know you can't very well tell a fellow what kind of a house he must build any more than you can tell him what way he must comb his hair. Personal liberty. But mind you this, there isn't a single foot of ground owned in this town. It still belongs to the bears, the cougars and the rabbits, et al., if a real deed were to be made out. Therefore, I'm going to say how much of the land each is to get—and the Dago is going to get enough to build himself a shack on. It will be about two by four and if he can hold dances in there, well let him do it."

"As I intimated before, Captain, you're a rare creature of intelligence."

"With your tongue you should have no fears of beating down that poor, ill, defenseless girl to submitting to marry you."

"You flatter me."

"Nothing like you have been trying to fool me. You know a man of your blarney would make a good politician, and so I, as a committee of one, hereby open negotiations to place you as a candidate for office in this new Taptown."

"But now you are getting ridiculous."

"No, I'm serious, Flitton. I want to tell you something. I'm going to control this town. I'm tired of doing it with my fist. I'm going to be the boss, but I'm going to be behind the throne. The only way we can have much success here is by popular government, but I want to tell you before you start that I intend to have a finger in the pie, my whole hand if necessary. Now, are you beginning to see what I mean?"

"Yes, I do. You're an unusual policeman, Captain. I am beginning to realize for the first time what a tremendous work you have cut out for yourself with your small force. Let me tell you, Saunders, if I can help, I'm at your bidding."

"Now, that is something like what I wanted to hear. Listen to me. Just as soon as there are enough shacks in this town to properly house people, and our hunters get going better and we have enough to eat, the men will be wanting something to do darn badly. The first thing will be the great game of running a town. We'll have all the offices, and we will have a spirited election. We hope to put our ticket into office—if not, well we can prepare for trouble."

"What do you want me to do?"

"Run for mayor—and win."

Flitton stood thoughtfully beside the table for some minutes. Then he said:

"This is an unusual thing for me. I'm in a country that I'm not even a citizen of—and asked to run for office. Well, I suppose most of the men here are not Canadians either. I've got just as much right to control a town I'm living in as any one else, especially in an emergency like this. I'll do it, captain. I'll run for mayor—and I'll win."

Saunders raised a large hand and brought it down with violence on the boy's shoulder.

"The conference is ended, my boy, except for formation of your ticket."

XIII

UNION JACK DANCE HALL
By order M.P. under temporary management of
A. COHEN, GENERAL MERCHANT
will be opened for business
DECEMBER 23. 8 P.M.
Don't forget the date!
MUSIC BY THE TAPTOWN INSTRUMENTAL BAND!

This hall will be run on a strictly business basis. Those who still have cash must pay cash. Those temporarily in financial difficulty will be expected to sign chits, payable at the first payday after the road resumes work. The management asks that chits be not allowed to run too high. Use discretion and don't cheat a man who lost everything in the fire.

Come one and come all. No admission. Soft drinks, only, served, by orders of M.P. Some choice brands found back of my place where I had buried to keep from freezing. No charge for dancing or looking on.

Special entertainments planned.

Roughness will not be tolerated.

—A. Cohen, mgr.

THE whole town read that sign within a half hour after Cohen had written it in pencil on wrapping paper found at the post.

Would they be there? Yes, "come one and come all" was correct.

They did. When Wally and Saunders wandered in that night, half an hour before festivities were to start, they found the hall packed and the crowd clamoring for music.

Somehow, little Cohen had gathered together a violin, an accordion and some sort of zither. The last mentioned was the property of Cohen himself. It had been loaned to one of the constables a few nights before the fire and was thus saved. Cohen was to play it himself, and before he had opened its case it became known as the Jew's-harp. Where the other instruments came from no one seemed to know, but it is safe to conjecture, they were saved in the same spirit that a person displays when he reaches first for the canary when he awakens and finds the house in flames.

Fifteen minutes before eight o'clock, the entire town, except two constables on angry duty at the jail, was there and Cohen's orchestra broke forth with its opening number, "The Maple Leaf Forever." They played "Soldier Boy," "Silver Threads Among the Gold," "After the Ball," and "Sweet Marie."

The response was bedlam, into which Cohen broke to make a short speech. He emphasized the fact that he had always treated everyone squarely, had never short-weighted the mush or the dried apples from the big barrel and believed in live and let live.

"I haven't got a farthing," he said. "The Mounted have been kind enough to let me take over this hall because I was the heaviest loser in the fire. I only have the management temporarily until things are a little better settled, and I don't want anyone to think I'm trying to be a hog.

"In the first place, I know there ain't much money in town and in the second, there will be other halls allowed just as soon as the trails are open, Captain Saunders says. He says one hall is enough for the number of men here, and I think he's right.

"The captain is going to make an announcement of importance tonight. He's promised to make it short so that we can get on to the program. This includes a few numbers by our old favorite, Molly Pierson, the little danseuse of Broadway (he failed to mention of what city); a dance by Tilly Morgan, and Trixie the Girl from Dixie is going to both sing and dance, and there are several others.

"Let's hear the captain."

Saunders strode down the hall and climbed upon the stage.

"I'll take Mr. Cohen's hint and be short," he said with a smile. "In the first place, I want to announce that in the name of the Government I have taken over all property rights here until after we are relieved. The plan of the new town is practically carried out, our food supply is being rationed successfully and we are finding some very good shots among our hunters.

"I would say we have no fears for the future. The supplies at the post we found to be larger than we even hoped.

"Now, I want to thank everyone for the splendid cooperation you are giving the Mounted in their endeavors to bring back order out of the chaos that followed the fire. You are real men. I don't say this to flatter. It is a superlative term, I know, but I say it without qualifications.

"The second announcement I want to make is that I have something important to tell you. We need a city government. We shall have it, and it shall be yours to the last man. The Mounted will play no definite part in this.

"We are to have a mayor, a council, or cabinet. The campaign is open to all. Name your candidates and go to it. The more the merrier. The louder the noise, the better fun it will be.

"I will appoint a chairman who will open a meeting for nominations. Let me see. Well, you Flitton, you're handy, come up here and start things going."

Flitton came out of the crowd and hesitated below the stage.

"I don't know much about this sort of thing, captain," he said. "I think maybe some one else would—"

"Rubbish," snapped the captain. "You don't have to know anything to step up here and ask for nominations. Haven't you ever been in a lodge in your life? Get up here and don't be so —— girlish."

The speech had its effect. A dozen hands urged Flitton on, and he mounted the stage, bashful and diffident to all appearances.

"Let the wimmin vote," screamed some of the girls from off-stage.

There was a roar of laughter.

"Gee, you did me dirt, captain," yelled Flitton. "Already there's a motion before the house that I don't know what to do with."

"Turn it down," roared a voice at the back of the room. "She ain't no woman, she's a girl."

"Pretty neat," called Flitton. "I'd like to nominate you, whoever you are, for minister of domestic relations."

They laughed again. Captain Saunders, standing now with Wally and Corporal Henry in the rear of the hall, wondered how he had not taken more notice of young Flitton before the night of the fire.

"Well, come you fellows," Flitton was calling. "I suggest we have a regular cabinet. Let's see. Well how about this—mayor, minister of war and munitions, secretary of state, secretary of the interior, of commerce, of labor, of treasury, and, oh, yes, secretary of peace."

There was a short silence—then a voice from the left wing:

"Mr. Chairman, why not let the mayor appoint the cabinet?"

Odd, thought Captain Saunders, how the very idea he and Flitton had been thinking about lately should come from a man standing beside Dago Jim. Flitton tried to hide his surprize.

"It's whatever you say," he called down. "It would simplify matters a lot. We'll take a vote if there is a second to it."

There came a ready second. The motion carried almost unanimously.

"Ready for nominations," said the chairman.

"How about the incumbent?" called some one.

"What incumbent?" asked Flitton, the innocent.

"You, yourself."

"Naw, I'm just temporary. I couldn't be a mayor," Flitton laughed.

"Yes, you're all right, kid. I stick your name up. Flitton, ain't it?"

"Well, yes. If you insist. Everyone's got to do his share. I'll stand, but come on with some others."

His eyes roved toward Dago Jim Pochini's corner where a hasty caucus had been called.

"Come on," he yelled with a note of defiance in his voice. "Come on. The more the merrier."

"Tony Cable!" shot out from Jim's corner.

"Good. Tony Cable," called the chairman. "Now, who else?"

"Nobody," came shouts from all corners. "Nobody. Let 'em fight it out. They're a good pair. Put the gloves on 'em and let 'em decide that way. Real action, that."

"No fair kissin' in the clinches!"

"Give the kid a handicap of fifty votes!"

"How 'bout 'lection cigar, Flitton?"

"I'll sell my vote for a good chawr o' baccy, Tony!"

Flitton let them have it out with a smile, calling in the short lulls for more nominations. None came.

"That's enough," came a final shout.

"The nominations are closed if I hear a motion for it," said the chairman.

Cohen jerked his orchestra into "There'll Be a Hot Time"

And Taptown's first election campaign was under way with a roar.

XIV

ONE week later Flitton held his first torch light parade. The Flitton faction, now backing their candidate solidly under the name of the Lord Roberts Nationalists, had been drying pine needle brooms for some days about the rock-stove fires, and their torches flared bravely as they wound up and down the avenue.

Some dwarfed genius had painted a big portrait of the candidate on a light gray blanket, and with this unfurled José Cabranni, relieved now of his nursing duties, marched well ahead. Flitton plodded along in the midst of his party, casting big smiles to the right and left as he waved a brown derby that some gallant gambler had worn before the fire. His big smile hid the real laugh he would have liked to have. Miss Laura Tam waved a handkerchief to him from the doorway of the new company office.

The Nationalists' candidate made a stirring speech from the platform before the Union Jack Dance Hall. It got some cheers and many boos, all of which Flitton answered with a wave of his dilapidated derby. They broke up the parade, feeling the confidence of coming victory.

The Canadian Liberals had made no demonstration.

Flitton commented on this fact later that evening to Captain Saunders.

"If they would only come out and fight in the open," he protested, "I would know just where we stood. Now the crowd cheers or gives me a catcall as it feels inclined at the moment. There is neither warmth nor animosity."

"The issue is clearly defined," replied the captain. "You realize as well as I do why it was the Dago wanted only two men to run. He knew he could control one of them and that if two issues only were in the race he had a chance to swing the election.

" 'Bring the old times back again.' You know the old cry that is put up every election by some party. That is what Tony Cable is using very quietly.

"Don't forget Boe is behind this. This Boe I have already told you something about and much more you have heard, of course. I find he is still on everyone's tongue. All he would need to do is put in an appearance now and he would have the town by the ears.

"You see, aside from getting enough food together to fill their bellies, this crowd has nothing to do now that most of the shacks are built. It would only need a leader of the wrong sort to stir up a lot of trouble.

"My scout tells me that Boe is still too far from recovered to take an active part in this matter, but, believe me, he is working just the same. He is giving orders from his shack, and it is Jim who is taking them. Jim Poechini realizes that by having his men in the high chair he will have the hall again and all the privileges he can use there. He needs Boe's aid to have a lawless town. He has foolish hopes.

"Perhaps I have foolish hopes, too. If I didn't, I suppose I would go out, get a couple of my men killed and bring him in and hang him to some tree."

"But the other party is really very strong," said Flitton. "I'm afraid most of the fellows here don't take me very seriously. The only way I can see to campaign is to be half humorous about it. Most of them don't take the whole thing seriously, knowing they have little to gain or lose.

"It was a lucky idea of yours to open that hall just before Christmas. We had quite a time after all. Bags of nuts, couple of sticks of candy and everything."

"Gifts weren't very plentiful, I suppose, but did you give any?"

"Well, no."

"Not even to Miss Tam? Don't fool me, Flitton."

Flitton smiled slowly.

"I might as well admit," he said quietly, "that I gave away my mother's ring that I used to carry on a string around my neck."

"Well, well. Happiness to you, Flitton."

"Thanks, captain. I wish that the trails would be open sooner. We plan to get down then and find a minister somewhere."

"Don't you worry," encouraged Saunders. "I was never in a town of ruffians like this that I didn't discover a minister that once was. Some fellow who has his credentials tucked away under his shirt, well hidden. You know there are many ministers who have no churches. Every camp has one or two who have deserted the cloth to take up a pick and shovel. I'll find you one, Flitton."

"Good. There should be the First Lady of Taptown, of course."

XV

PETE LEFEVRE brought word one night to Captain Saunders that Boe was on his feet again. He had sat on the edge of his cot for one hour—talking. It wasn't the fact that Boe was well enough to sit up that worried Saunders; it was what Pete told him about what had been said.

Pete had crept under the window. So secure had the gang become that even the lookout was inside.

There had been half a dozen men there, and Saunders knew everyone of them. Dago Jim and Boe did most of the talking. It was Boe who gave the orders, while Jim reported like a private in the ranks.

"We've been workin'," Jim had said,

"but it's to be a tough job. We don't got no p'rades but ever' night boys meet wit' me and talk thin's. You got beeg friends, eh? They like you, eh? You betcha."

"Just exactly one hundred and ten people can vote," replied Boe. "That means you must have fifty-six to win for our friend, Tony, here. Your crowd's been working hard and have the pledges of seventy-five, you say. You better get more. A lot of these suckers lie, you know."

"I know, but we tell 'em if Tony 'lected they no pay no chits or nothin'. We run this Jew outa town and get hall 'gain. ''Clare everythin' off. Open wide and I get thata liquor outa hole for 'em, free. This captain fella, he say mayor beeg man and his cab'net give permissions. They like thata talk. They vote Tony."

"Well, don't let them fool you. Remember a lot of these fellows are just sentimental fools and may get to like this kid. You make your talk strong. Let them know I'm alive. The election is in two weeks. That gives you plenty of time. Get a little of that whisky out of that hole some night and show them a sample so they'll know you really have it.

"I've got a big plan for that night when the election is held. If your work fails and they fall for this kid, I'm going to walk into that hall and stampede the crowd for Tony.

"Don't worry about me. I can do it. Let the word get around that Boe is still here and if I have to come I will have the old crowd with me."

"But this Mounted fella, he won't let you," whispered Jim. "He'll shoot you like he did me onct."

"Oh, I know the captain only too well. He's an old fool. I'm going to play on his weakness. You know the new expression about fathead? That's this captain. He thinks he wants to control the town just as I intended to do—by having everyone a friend.

"Well, I'll be there, and I'll arrange it beforehand so the Mounted won't bother me until I'm through. And when I am through I'll move out of there before they can take me. I expect you men here to protect me, of course."

There had been other words and orders faithfully reported by Lefevre, but they were not of great importance to the captain.

"Pete," he said, "sneak around and find this young Flitton. Try Mr. Tam's house first."

XVI

IT WAS not long after Boe held his meeting that Captain Saunders arrested the first drunk Taptown had seen since the fire. The man, one of those whom Pete had named as being at the conference in Boe's shack, promptly went before the court and then into the jail for thirty days. It was a drastic sentence. The prisoner had refused to tell the source of the liquor.

Two days after the arrest some one cheated at cards at the Union Jack and there had been a brawl. Two more arrests and thirty days for each. The next day a fist fight started in the street. It was over opposing politics. Saunders lectured them and let them go.

"A person might lose his temper over politics, I suppose," said the captain. "I'm beginning to do it myself. Get out of here and if you come back I'll take your votes away."

Flitton continued his speeches, but he felt his audiences were getting a trifle bored. His promises were not so glowing as those he knew his opponent was making quietly somewhere else.

"I find them just big kids, most of them," he complained to Saunders and Sergeant Wally. "They want promises of candy for being good. I can't offer them a darn thing but words."

"I suppose we'll have to reach them some other way, or we're lost," said the captain.

"Well, if we're lost," put in Wally, "we kin just stand some of them up against a wall and shoot them. It will be the only way out. The trail won't open for two months or more yet."

"Your solution is fairly good," said Saunders, "but I don't think we had best use it."

"Then give 'em sentiment," snorted Wally.

"If Mr. Flitton is willing," snapped the captain, "we will. I tried him on it after Pete came through with his information about Boe's conference. Get your unshaven heads over here while I argue again with our candidate."

It was almost early morning before Flitton agreed.

XVII

Captain Saunders:

It is time to open communications again.

Word has just come to me that you have dug up some preacher and that he will marry your candidate and a certain Miss Tam on the eve of the election. Of course, all is fair in politics.

Let us be candid with each other. I think you know I would like a certain man to be elected. I also know you are backing young Flitton. You also must know where I have been recovering from the results of the little battle on the plateau. Why you have never come to get me is beyond me, but perhaps you knew the reception that we had planned for you.

Well, whatever your purpose—and your faults—I do have the fond hope that since you are to take an unfair advantage of the voters that I might be allowed a fair one.

The men of Taptown are fools at best. The coup of having them vote for the newlyweds is real genius. I never knew a crowd of rough fellows in a rough town that wouldn't go crazy over a wedding.

Here is my request; I want to appear in the hall just before the voting starts. I want to be allowed to talk to the crowd. Ten minutes is all I ask. I want you to promise you will not molest me until the time is up. I will disappear while the voting is in progress.

My talk is just as fair as the wedding. I will make a plea for Tony. I believe I can offset the effect the wedding will have. If I can't, then come and get me. If I do, you must swear to let me alone until the trails are open.

It's a sporting proposition. I am cornered here anyway. When the trails are open I will not flee. I will be at your service—with my gun.

Boe.

"WELL, boys, what do you think of that?" asked the captain.

"I think some one is crazy," snorted Wally. "He wants a chance to escape."

"And I think the wedding is off," replied Flitton.

"You're crazy, both of you," muttered the captain.

"But do you think I'd go on with a thing like this? Why, it's cheating, Captain. I'm sorry I ever agreed to hold the wedding before all those fellows."

"Bosh and rubbish!" ejaculated Saunders. "If it had ever happened I wanted a wife bad enough I'd get her before a lot of witnesses and have a real big affair of it."

"Well, she's not too keen for it anyway. I guess we'll have it after election, quietly in her home."

"No, you won't," snapped Saunders. "You'll have it where I say you will."

"No one will be a dictator over me," said the boy quietly. "I'll get married where and when I please."

"No, you won't here. I must issue a license first."

"Then we'll wait until the trails are open as we first intended. We're going back to my home in the South anyway. She needs warmer climate."

"Listen to me, boy," said the captain just as quietly. "You gave me a promise. The announcement of the wedding has been made, and whether you know it or not, it's to be the big stroke. I don't think you got my idea after all.

"I don't care much who's elected mayor, Flitton. It doesn't mean anything anyway, legally. I thought it would be something to keep this gang out of mischief. Well, it hasn't very much, but your wedding plans have. I never saw such excitement in my life. All the girls are making stuff for the bride. They all feel as if they were her big sisters, or bridesmaids, or matrons of honor or whatever it is they have at weddings.

"Behind the entire thing, Flitton, is a crazy notion of mine. I have planned that we should beat Boe at his own game, that we should go right into his camp and take his own followers from him and make them real men. I thought I could teach them citizenship—perhaps I have started to. I hope so.

"But if you lose that election, if you fail me now, and Boe beats me with his gang in this town—well, I'm going out of the force a beaten man after twenty-five years of service. This job here has been a greater one than I have ever had to handle. In a different way, of course.

"This is the first time in my career that I have tried to win by peace instead of war. But whatever the consequences, I am going to allow this speech. I want you to help me, Flitton."

Flitton sat down and his eyes held to the table before him.

"I'm goin' out of the service pritty soon, too," said Stevens. "I guess I'll go when Sandy does. It took me a long time to git 'round to his way of thinkin', but I'm there. I'd give a lot to have Sandy's last job go. I'd think you could do a little thing like a weddin' fer us, Flitton."

The boy lifted his face and there was a smile on it.

"Well," he said, "I guess it's true weddings are a show anyway. Besides everything here is everybody's business now.

I'll go through with it. Let's go farther yet and have it right in the dance hall. I'll tie bells on my nose if it will make it go better."

The two old timers treated their candidate to a cup of tea from under the cozy.

"And now," said the captain, raising his cup, "in this English breakfast tea the Mounted drank the Queen's health on her birthday, always. I raise it now to the bride."

They turned their empty cups bottoms up.

XVIII

AFTER the little toast they settled down to discuss plans for the great evening. Although now in accord, there was no denying the fact that Sergeant Stevens and Flitton were worried over the public appearance of Alexander Boe.

"It is true," said the captain, recognizing their secret fears, "that Boe is a great actor. He lives for applause. I do believe that if he had not found men in this territory that were ready to follow and applaud him he would have gone into other pursuits long ago. Here he found a perfect setting for his special kind of acting. Men were looking for trouble. All they needed to make it was organization. In other words, a leader.

"Boe saw that, and although I am convinced he came here originally to try to get me in some manner—ruin my reputation as a policeman mostly—I know now he found an ideal situation for his game. I want to let you fellows know I understand he is dangerous, but that I realize what I am doing."

"Whatever you do, Captain, is what I do," muttered Sergeant Stevens quietly.

"Boe," said Flitton, "is a proud man from all I can gather about him. I agree with you, Captain, that he is an actor. Not the kind perhaps that would be a great matinee idol. I mean a man who lives for the plaudits of his group, no matter how small. He must be the leader, the man looked up to. Once he loses his followers, he will never fight again, I am sure. If he were made ridiculous, captain—"

"Um-m. Boy, you're reading my mind."

"Perhaps I am, Captain. Let something happen during that speech. Nothing brutal. Nothing that could throw sympathy to him. Just make a plain, good, old-fashioned ass out of him."

"There is little sympathy in this crowd, Flitton. Only sentimentality. It should be something to knock his speech flat as a finnan haddie."

"Yes. Take away his cocksureness. Ridicule him. Show him to be a poor, second-rate ham-and-egg actor."

"I don't know your expression," said the captain, "but one part of it is what I am thinking about. There is something greater, far greater, than force that will ruin Boe's spectacular and dramatic hold on these people. I'm going to tell you about it. On the toss of events growing out of it we will take battle and perhaps defeat—or a bloodless victory. Here, flap your ears this way while I tell you about it."

XIX

THE Union Jack Instrumental Band was playing the wedding march from "Lohengrin."

"Here they come!"

The red-nosed Rev. Jonathan Quigley, from parish unknown, had already taken his place on the stage. Down the aisle made by the divided crowd came the frightened Flitton, with Captain Saunders, in full parade dress, at his side.

"Looks like he's pinched in style," came a whisper.

"Mebbe he is. The gerl's got him fer life."

Snickers came and went. Wally, also in parade uniform, stepped jauntily down the aisle and took his place in front, far to the left. There was nothing in his manner to show that he was thinking tonight of the great and final test of his career.

"The lad will be encouraged by friends close at hand," he murmured to himself, "and besides I can get the first glimpse of Boe when he comes in."

The band squeaked on.

At last the bride.

Leaning on the arm of Mr. Tam came the girl, followed by every woman in Taptown, including Mrs. Jones, whose husband held in his arms an interested infant at the back of the hall.

The girls had dresses made for the wedding from what they had saved. One or two of them looked suspiciously like embroidered sheets.

The Rev. Quigley, nervously remembering a service he had not read for many a day, opened the ceremonies with a rush. It was a long, impressive chapter from the Bible, which had been loaned by one of the younger constables—the only Bible in Taptown. The preacher had a remarkable voice that carried to the far corners of the hall. He prayed. There were watery eyes. Then he dashed into the wedding.

"And you take this man, Dick Flitton, to be—"

"And you take this woman, Laura Tam, to be—"

A ring passed. A short prayer. A frightened, quick kiss. They were married.

The crowd went wild. It rushed forward, swept Flitton off his feet and bore him about the hall. The girls mobbed the bride. Captain Saunders and Wally took advantage of the confusion to feel for guns in the crowd.

Only Tony Cable and Dago Jim Poechini were not carried away by the fervor of the crowd. They pressed in and stood near Flitton as he was dropped from the shoulders.

There was an ugly look on both of their faces. They thought, with Boe, that an unfair advantage had been taken of them. Others thought so too, but none of them took the election as seriously as these three. Those who had given it any thought knew it for a farce, a comedy at best.

"Three cheers for the pritty li'l bride!"

It was given with a roar. Cable and Poechini gave nothing to the din. They had another idea in mind. They had talked it over days before when the announcement of the date of the wedding had been made. Boe knew nothing of it.

They would beard this youngster, this silly speech maker, this political boaster, this tool of the Mounted. They'd show him up as a weakling right before the crowd. That would swing victory into defeat before it occurred, turn a trick back on the magician.

They had real hopes of success. Flitton had been an easy-going young fellow. He had never had a two-fisted, feet-and-teeth scrap since he had come to Taptown. But he would fight. His jaw showed it. Cable and Poechini knew that. They were opportunists.

They would insult him, but make it appear that he was the aggressor. Do it quietly. Then let him have it. Both were to jump in. Then Cable was to flee. Poechini, backed into a corner, perhaps taking a terrific beating, would taunt him on, madden him with an insult about his bride.

Then Poechini would go down, crying he was being murdered. Perhaps the gang would come to his rescue. If not, another insult about the girl would suffice. Flitton would probably rush in, lift him off the floor and start the fight anew.

It was this probability that would turn the trick. Being unmercifully beaten, Poechini would draw his gun. He'd get him so he'd never rise again. Of course he would be arrested, but there was always Boe, who, after tonight, would again have the town with him. There would be only one candidate in the race.

And so it was decided.

Flitton was working his way through the crowd toward his wife when Poechini pressed against his side. He turned and saw Cable too. He wondered if they were going to shake hands with him.

"You stepped on my feet," said Poechini belligerently.

"Perhaps I did," replied Flitton. "I've done a lot of that tonight. If I have specialized on yours I would have known it, I guess."

He attempted to move away. He saw both the sergeant and Saunders pressing in and didn't want to start trouble he knew the two officers would probably finish in a drastic fashion.

Cable grasped his arm.

"I ain't ust ta kids buttin' me 'round!"

"Well, I'm not butting anyone in particular. I didn't order this crowd to push me against you, did I?"

"You oughta leas' beg pardon," snapped Poechini.

Flitton's young temper flared.

"Beg pardon!" he cried. "Beg pardon! What for?"

" 'Cause you a pighead!"

Flitton plunged forward. His fist shot out in a flash and Poechini fell. The crowd closed in. Someone lifted Poechini and all three found themselves in the grip of friends.

"Not with the wife here, Flitton," whispered a friend.

Flitton strained at the arms about him.

"I know what you're after," he yelled to the two men crouching opposite him.

"You're trying to make trouble here because you know I don't specially want it. Get out of the way, both of you or I'll punch your heads in."

He attempted to turn away, suddenly thinking of the girl he had just made his wife, and who must be standing somewhere near, frightened and perhaps a little disgusted.

"You skeered," sneered Poechini.

Suddenly Flitton went berserk. He hurled men right and left. He flung his coat and vest into the crowd. It scattered.

"Here, —— you!" shouted Saunders.

He flung himself upon the boy only to be hurled off his balance and thrown away.

"Wally, step in here."

The sergeant stepped up and his eyes glowered into the faces of Poechini and Cable as he attempted to fasten his iron arms about the boy. He only grasped one arm, but he clung there like a terrier.

"Let go!" roared Flitton. "I'll kill him!"

But the captain was clinging to the other arm now. Flitton was helpless.

"Let go, —— it!" he snarled.

"No! No! Flitton!" shouted the captain. "Hold, boy. Cool, boy, cool. Don't be a madman. Listen for a minute."

"I'll listen nothing! You heard him!"

"Yes, boy," Saunders said with a quiet voice. "But listen just the same. You know what I said. No bloodshed."

"I'll kill both of them!" repeated Flitton.

Saunders' eye caught those of Stevens and he nodded.

With a sharp click handcuffs snapped upon Flitton's pinioned wrists. Flitton shook himself viciously but it was a useless effort.

"NOW listen to me," said the captain addressing Poechini and Cable. "I'm not stopping Flitton from licking both of you right here and now. It's against my code to let a fellow scrap on his wedding night. But since you two are looking for a fight, by ——, I'm going to give it to you myself. Here, Wally, take my guns."

He flung off his bandolier with his red jacket. Stevens gathered the jacket and the two guns with slow movements.

"Here, you," he roared at Cable and Poechini, "gimme your guns —— smart like!"

But the two had not removed their coats.

"We got no fight wit' you," said Cable.

"You got a fight with me right now," snarled the captain. "I'll show you two sour-noses something!"

"The sergeant got guns," said Tony.

Wally suddenly straightened up. He flung away the captain's coat and bandolier and his own followed into the pile.

"You mean, o' course," he yelled. "that you want me, too. Heavenly musquash! Let's up!"

He began to spit on his hands.

A slow smile was coming around the corners of Saunders' mouth.

"My fight, sergeant."

"Nay they insulted me. They try to say I'm a coward that'd stand off and shoot 'em in the middle of a fight!"

He was already crouching like an animal and advancing upon both of them.

"Let's up!" he roared. "Let's up!"

The captain's face broke into a smile at the sight of his old friend leaping upon such a slim opportunity to join in with him.

"What you say, you two?" he called. "Is it 'up' or not?"

To put a little more emphasis into his words, he too, took up Wally's comical crouch.

"We doan't fight no police," said Tony definitely.

Jim and he began to lose ground before the advance.

" 'Tain't fair. You fight and then 'rest us."

Flitton's arm came upon that of the captain.

"Listen here," he said. "This is my matter, Saunders."

"Your matter," snapped Saunders. "You're out of this long ago. This is a personal brawl. You get out of the road. When trouble starts it's the job of the Mounted to finish it, and that's what the sergeant and I am going to do right now. Either it's 'up', you two, or call quits."

He flung Flitton aside.

"Three of you now," wailed Tony and he deliberately turned into the crowd.

"It's 'up!' " shouted Saunders.

Blood-loving Wally dashed in, swinging his great fists. The crowd opened before him. Tony and Jim broke and ran. The crowd yelled. A laugh came suddenly. It was the captain, bending over and slapping his knees with both hands.

Flitton stood beside him, boiling to fight on his wedding night.

"I think you played me a dirty trick, Captain. I should have had another punch at him."

"Look at him, look at him," roared Saunders. "Really, Flitton, have you ever seen such an actor in your life as that sergeant of mine?"

Wally was still charging through the crowd, bowling men right and left, searching wildly for the two who had escaped. Suddenly he bumped into the patient Mr. Jones who still held the baby. The baby screamed.

"My ——!" said Wally. "Here give it me. I'll play chuck-a-hoss with him!"

But the mother had rushed up.

"You get 'way," she said fretfully. "You big brute. Goin' 'round lookin' fer fights like a school boy. I'll box yer ears if you make my baby cry 'gain."

"MUSIC!" called the captain. "Come on, Cohen. Let's have a song from somebody, and then we'll bring on the ballot boxes."

The Union Jack band broke forth. Trixie from Dixie rasped out a song. The applause was tremendous.

"The vote! The vote!"

"Flitton! Flitton! The fightin' kid!"

"Five to one on the kid. Who takes?"

"Five chits or dollars?"

A laugh.

"Here, you, five to one. Good bet any old time. Gimme."

"Flitton! Flitton! Speech!"

But Flitton was nowhere to be found. Mrs. Flitton had started for her house with her father and Flitton had raced after her. As he left her there, he promised that the incident was ended and that under no circumstances would he fight that night.

"I hate to leave you, girl," he said softly, "but I ought to be there."

"It's as I want it," she answered. "You see this thing through, Dick. After tonight it will be all over."

"And then we will wait for the trail to open and our honeymoon will really start."

"Just as soon as the trail opens?" laughed the girl.

"Well, just as soon as money can get through," he laughed in return.

"Money means nothing here," she answered with a smile. "And I suppose it never will mean very much to us, Dick. At least I hope so."

"It never has," said her husband.

He had never told her that outside of Memphis he had a plantation that had come to him at the death of his mother. It took fifty colored boys just to plow that place in spring.

He kissed her and went away.

He had certain plans to carry out. He stopped at Sam Ying's little shack. There were the canaries inside and several of the puppies, now old enough to have elementary manners inside the house. And snuggled under a strange looking coop of fir and poplar were the five hens, also rescued from the fire.

"Aren't you coming to vote for me?" asked Flitton.

Sam laughed, with his bright cackle.

"No flote. No time fo' play, Mlister Fleeton."

"Well, then let's talk business. How much are eggs?"

"One dollar."

"Meaning each, of course."

The Chinaman nodded.

"Um—kinda dear. How many you got?"

"Ten now."

"Now? How long you had 'em?"

"Very flesh," said Sam without batting an eye.

"Yes, of course. Cold storage up here. Well, if I didn't want them for a very special purpose I wouldn't buy. Let me have the whole ten."

"Ten dollar."

Flitton went into his watch pocket and produced the money.

"I'm awful foolish," he said, as he walked away with the eggs in the famous brown derby of the campaign which he had grabbed as he left Mr. Tam's house. "Broke on my wedding night!"

Back at the hall he had time to join in the applause for Milly's dance.

There was a cry of "Vote! Vote!"

He caught a glimpse of Wally in the crowd and noticed a strange tightness in his face. Captain Saunders he saw moving impatiently in the rear of the hall. He took his place at the captain's side.

"Everything O.K.?" he whispered.

"Yes, Lefevre's here. He reports Boe outside the rear door of the stage."

Flitton nodded. "I'm ready," he said.

"Where are Cabranni and Fanen?"

"I passed them rummaging around in a garbage heap."

"The ballot boxes are coming," Cohen was shouting. "We'll line up on the right of the room and come down to the front.

"You kin write the candidate's name on the slips. They are all numbered. Say the number that's posted after your name on the wall and you'll get that slip. After you've written in the name, you step up and give your own name to the clerk. He will check you off. But before your ballot is deposited he will tear off the number of it and throw it on the floor."

"Fair enough!"

There was a wild rush to get in line. The crowd began to mill. Good-natured fighting for the head of the line took place. There were shouts, yells, and coarse jokes flying about. The girls had retired upstairs.

Suddenly the hall was shocked by a strange voice.

"Just a minute, please."

It was from the stage. The milling stopped. A sudden silence came.

THEY turned and saw Alexander Boe standing in the center of the stage holding firm to a rough board chair.

"Just a minute, if you please."

"Boe! Old Boe!"

"Well, I'll be ——!"

"So he wasn't dead!"

"Old Boe!"

"Well, could you imagine. Wanted by the police, too!"

They surged forward.

"Get him!"

"—— no! Let him speak!"

"The —— with him! The dirty louse!"

"—— crook!"

"No, let him speak!"

"Whose ear you shoutin' in?"

"Aw, go to ——, you!"

Fists milled. Others closed in and pulled them apart.

"Yea; let him speak!" came a shout.

"Go on, Boe!"

"Shsss—"

At last some semblance of order came.

Boe's voice began to reach back to the captain over the heads of the crowd, now congregated near the stage. Saunders saw Flitton standing back a little, his face grave. Under his arm he still held the hat. Beside him now stood Cabranni and Fanen. They too were solemnly watching the stage and now and then looking with dog-like devotion toward the captain. They had bulging coats. Fanen was fully well now. What friends the two had turned out to be.

"There comes a time," Boe was saying, "when those who care for their fellow men must take their lives in their hands and come forward. This is such a situation. I stand here wanted by the Mounted Police. Several of them are here now. Captain Saunders stands back there. He does not come and take me. Why? I leave the answer to you."

"Rather unfair after the letter he wrote," thought Saunders.

"I have come from a sick bed," Boe went on. "Perhaps it is my death bed. Only time will tell. I come here to plead with you. I come to ask that you not do give up your liberty.

"The uncompromising position of the police is known to you all. They have stolen your rights, taken advantage of the circumstances that followed the fire. If you are human beings you inherit liberty. The Mounted took everything from you.

"Even your entertainment has been controlled by a favorite of the Mounted. It has been confined to mere childishness. You are men who have lived roughly, who take your pleasures where you find them. Here you are being dished out of your pleasures after looking over a menu prepared by the Mounted."

"Ain't so," came the angry voice of Cohen. "I got this place 'cause I lost—"

"Shut up, Cohen. Let him talk!"

Cohen subsided. He walked back to Saunders.

"This ain't right," he complained. "Him comin' here and knockin' my business, Captain."

"You go over to Flitton and do just what he does," replied the captain quietly.

Cohen went without a word.

"Either lift up your heads," Boe was racing on dramatically, "or crawl. Be more than animals! Listen to me. Cable has sworn to give you back full privileges. He will open up this town to its former glories."

"Well," muttered the captain. "He only asked that he be not molested for ten minutes in his letter. He's almost had his full time."

"I am through," went on Boe. "Let me hear your answer. I ask for your support.

Elect Tony Cable. Come! Let me hear your answer."

Flitton, watching the captain out of the corner of his eye, saw him with his eyes on a watch. Suddenly Saunders snatched a bandana from his coat pocket.

"Here is your answer," yelled Flitton. "One dollar's worth of egg."

Over the heads of the crowd went a white ball. It struck full on the chest of Boe and broke like a yellow rocket.

Boe the spectacular reeled back, stunned. He had no time to cry out before another egg splattered against his fur cap.

"Stop that man!" he yelled pointing back to Flitton. "He is another tool of the police!"

The crowd turned and broke toward Flitton.

Fanen and Cabranni had emptied their coats and at their feet now was piled a strange heap of assorted refuse.

Even as the crowd turned, Cohen joined them in flinging out the "bullets" with uncanny aim. A potato with long, pale sprouts on it, sped past Boe's ear as he crouched now by the chair.

Boe's fingers slipped inside his coat, and at the movement Saunders' revolver was in his hand.

But Boe did not draw. He stood there still defiant. The crowd would not turn against him, he thought. It was to be a fight.

Stevens and Saunders thought so too and they were closing in with drawn revolvers.

Cohen threw an onion, long lost in the snow, with bad judgment and it struck one of the crowd near the stage. There were wild yells.

"Let's up!"

"Oh, sister! The kid's there!"

Suddenly the attackers were overwhelmed by the crowd. Flitton felt himself go back. He covered his head with his hands as he sprawled to protect himself from the rushing feet.

Laughter. Great shouts. Yells of joy as from school boys playing a rough and tumble game.

An ancient salted haddock went sailing through the air toward the stage. Other attackers leaped to the pile.

Saunders stopped short, and his gun slipped behind his back. He watched Boe on the stage, crouched now, still defiant, cursing the crowd below.

Then catching the eye of his sergeant, Captain Saunders nodded toward the stage and swung on his heels. He dashed through a side door into the right wing of the stage. Stevens walked deliberately down the center of the hall, and Boe saw him coming.

Behind Stevens a group of grown up kids were having the time of their lives sprawling on the floor, fighting good-naturedly over the remaining things to throw.

Fun was what these men wanted; and nothing more.

Suddenly Boe realized that he was beaten. Then it must be escape. His revolver was in his hand in an instant. Then he saw that of the sergeant was also drawn. He rushed into the right wing that led to the stage door.

XX

SAUNDERS stood in the darkness with his back against the stage door. It was there he saw Boe running away from his audience.

"Boe!"

At the call Boe stopped, his gun suddenly gripped before him, his eyes searching the darkness.

"It's Captain Saunders, Boe. Just drop that gun."

Boe dropped to one knee, his eyes peering for sure aim. Cornered, he must fire straight and true to the mark. It was very dark.

"Don't be a fool, Boe."

Suddenly the desperado began to back away.

"Nerve gone, Boe? Look behind you. Sergeant Stevens is there."

"Yea," came the gruff voice from Boe's rear, "an' ain't goin' to get outa it, neither."

Boe stopped short, but he did not turn. Neither of the two policemen made a sound. Boe's gun arm went limply to his side.

"You're my prisoner," said Saunders, stepping from the darkness into the glow from the stage.

Standing there, alone, beaten, Boe, with his revolver hanging heavily in his hand, spoke sullenly.

"Not yours, Saunders. Even in surrender, I defy you."

He turned his egg-spattered back, and with a theatrical gesture tossed his revolver at the feet of Sergeant Stevens.

DAYS OF '49

CONCLUSION

by Gordon Young

"the days of OLD
The days of GOLD,
The days of '49"

"Author of "Pearl-Hunger," "La Rue of the 88," etc.

The first part of the story briefly retold in story form

INTO the town of San Francisco one July noon in the year 1849 rode Dick Hales, ex-Texas Ranger.

"Where can I find Hubert Lee?" was the question he put to the miners and hawkers in the street.

But Lee was out of town.

As Hales sat on his horse looking about at the people and the town, gold mad, drunken, lecherous, shoddy, he heard cries of—"Out of the way, we're Hounds. Hounds are coming," and a party of horsemen led by the infamous and beautiful Dona Elvira Eton rode up to him.

One, Jerry Fletcher, thinking him a Spaniard from his sombrero lifted his whip, crying—

"Out of the way, greaser."

Hales dragged him from his horse and stood over him, menacing.

"Let that man go, señor," said Elvira.

"Take your carrion," said Hales, "where can I find Hubert Lee?"

Dona Elvira did not know. Hubert Lee was to her but a name, although she knew his arch enemy, the blustering and prominent Col. Nevinson, very well.

She asked Hales his name.

"Hales?" she said, "I have heard that name before."

Noticing a sudden flicker of interest in Hales' eye she tried to pump him as to whom he sought in reality, but he, finding that she had no information useful to him, deserted her for the horse market.

There he sold his horse for two hundred dollars and repaired to the Magnolia, a saloon and gambling den run by Monsieur Max. There day and night, apparently never sleeping, sat Stewart Dawes, the gambler.

Hales walked up to him.

"Deal," he said.

He won three times his two hundred and left with a promise to return.

AT THAT moment a ship was docking at the wharf. It was from the Atlantic and although it would soon be deserted to the scavengers to convert into rooming-house, saloon, or brothel its arrival was an event, for it brought the great new mirror that was to adorn the Magnolia, and Mr. Tesla, a gentleman representative of a gambling syndicate, who intended to buy the place from M. Max. With Tesla came his daughter Ilona, and Kredra her Basque serving maid, who considered herself a seeress. On this ship also came John Taylor, a young lawyer, and Martin O'Day, a little cockney in search of gold.

Taylor disappeared into the crowd, and soon, by luck, got into conversation with Judge Deering, a champion of law and order in a city of bandits. The judge took him as his business partner.

The little cockney went to the Magnolia where he was immediately treated to the sight of Stewart Dawes shooting a card sharper. Soon he found himself talking to Hubert Lee who had just arrived from the mines. Lee told him that before he could be a miner he needed five hundred dollars' worth of outfit and a partner.

Just then Lee was whisked off by a friend who told him that Col. Nevinson was trying to outdo him in a business deal, and O'Day bumped into a large, good-natured drunken miner. After some talk these two agreed to become partners and went off to the room of Bill Burton, the miner. But Burton had no money and O'Day was at a loss to know where it was coming from. That night he stole out of the room, filled a bag with street dust and washers and went back to the Magnolia.

As he entered there was a report and a flash. When the crowd separated Hubert Lee lay dead on the floor and Nevinson stood over him with a smoking revolver. Beside him stood the cadaverous Bruce Brace, a member of the cowardly society of Hounds and his constant bodyguard.

"Days of '49," copyright, 1925, by Gordon Young.

O'Day walked up to the table of Dawes. There Dawes was arguing with a young Spaniard, José de Sola.

"Change your bet," said Dawes.

"Señor, I weel not," said José, and Dawes found himself looking into the barrel of a gun. He dealt to the Spaniard and the little cockney, who had crept up and laid his bag on the tray. O'Day won and crept back to his room.

IN THE meantime Nevinson was at the house of Dona Elvira, telling her about his fight with Lee. But she was not interested. This strange iron-faced stranger, Hales, interested her and she wished to find out who it was that Lee knew and Hales wanted. If she could find out she would enlist Ferdinand, a homeless singing vagabond, whose life she had once saved, and who was, therefore, her devoted slave, to draw Hales into an entanglement with her.

She discovered that there was an Anna Hales who had followed the colonel to California. What relation to Hales she was the colonel did not know, but this woman had fallen so low that she now lived in the infested slum, drinking and debauching herself in every way.

Elvira smiled and held her peace.

When the colonel had gone—

"Put me to bed early, Tota," she said to her maid. "I must be fresh tomorrow, for I have many things to do."

BURTON and O'Day were just coming from breakfast with their new wealth when they heard a baby crying. They entered the house from which the sound came. There lay a preacher, his wife and baby all sick and starving.

"How much better to get wisdom than gold," moaned the preacher.

"Ma'am," said Burton to the wife, "here's some money; an' we'll get some folks up here ta help ya pretty soon."

He ducked backward and out, and hurried off toward the center of the town, the Plaza.

"There's a parson an' his wife an' baby starvin' back there," cried Burton when he arrived.

The miners gathered round anxious to give money for their help. Thus Ezekial Preble and his family were helped back to health by the miners, and Preble started about the city denouncing sin.

IN THE Magnolia, Hales stood by José de Sola at the Dawes table. Hales and the Spaniard were friends. Though Hales had fought in the Mexican war he had lived in California for many years and had learned to like Spaniards. Hales had once stopped, when traveling, at the rancho of José's sweetheart. He had spoken a good word for José to the girl's hostile parents, and had later traded a horse from the young Spaniard for a fine revolver. He was now trying to buy or win this back, without success.

Having failed he turned to the gambling table.

"I'll tap your bank," he said to Dawes.

He won, leaving Dawes bankrupt. Hales offered to bet the whole thing on one card if the Magnolia would bank its game. Dawes walked off. He returned with Ilona Tesla, who in the absence of her father, the Magnolia's new proprietor, was prepared to take the responsibility. Hales won.

"I'll play it all," he said.

But just then Tesla hurried on the scene to drag his daughter away. With him came Col. Nevinson; Tesla just returned in time to prevent a gun-fight between Nevinson and Hales and José, the two latter, the colonel said, having insulted him. "Be here at one o'clock and I will have the money for you," said Tesla to Hales.

When he was alone a negro boy brought him a note from Dona Elvira saying that she had news for him. He waited on her at her apartments. She talked with him, trying to gain information about Anna Hales, his sister, as he said. But *he* forced the information that she had sunk to the lowest part of the Spanish quarter, out of Elvira, and then he left. When he had gone Elvira called her servant and told him to find Anna Hales.

Hales went to the Magnolia for his money. There he met Tesla and told him that José was ready for a fight with any gringo he might see, because his brother Don Esteban had recently had a lot of miners steal his horse and whip him. Don Esteban's friends and relatives, especially José and Don Gil Diego, were out to find the culprits, and would not rest until they had succeeded.

When Tesla had gone Dawes came up to Hales and asked for a loan, implying that he had cheated on the deal to make Hales win from the Magnolia.

Hales knocked the furious gambler down and went to return the money to Tesla.

Tesla was telling his daughter of a ranch of Col. Nevinson's, El Crucifijo, to which he was taking her out of the city.

That night Hales stood at the bar.

"Turn round, Mr. Hales," said the bartender without looking up.

Hales whirled about; his gun blazed three times. Other guns spoke.

When the smoke had cleared Hales and José were standing over several dead Hounds who had been killed in their attempt to assassinate Hales.

José had killed Bruce Brace and Jerry Fletcher.

Next day Anna Hales was brought to Dona Elvira Eton. She was drunk and helpless. Under the scheming talk of Elvira she seemed to repent of her old ways.

At the same time Hales, on the portico of the Parker House, was trying to persuade José to come with him to the mountains to help the travelers into California.

"No, señor," said José, "I must catch the men who took Don Esteban's horse."

"Be sure you kill the right men," said Hales.

"Kill?" said José. "A dead horse does not feel the branding iron. They will live until God blesses them with death. *Mediante Dios* "

AS JOSÉ sat there, Benito, a servant of his family's, passed by. José joined him. He and Benito rode off toward the Cowden rancho, El Crucifijo, to join Elvira's servant Ferdinand. This ranch was the same ranch to which Ilona Tesla had gone. It belonged to Col. Nevinson, but was claimed by Elvira and Ferdinand.

AT THE same moment Col. Nevinson, Ilona, her father and Kredra were arriving at El Crucifijo. Here lived Ferdinand and Pedro, a boy devoted to him. Ferdinand talked to the amusement of all but the colonel until he heard Kredra swearing in Basque. He rushed into the kitchen.

"You are one of my people," he cried, "I have not heard my own tongue since my vengeance of twenty years ago exiled me. Who is this girl?"

"She is a granddaughter of the benefactors of our people, the de Ruz family."

Thus Ferdinand became Ilona's slave.

The colonel called for a horse named Prince, about whom there was some mystery and who bore the de Sola brand, and rode off. With him rode Mr. Tesla and the colonel started to propose for the hand of his daughter in marriage. Interruptions forced their arrival in San Francisco with the question unspoken.

That afternoon Col. Nevinson went into Baer's saloon. The Hounds for revenge on account of José's part in the saloon fight were cleaning all the Spaniards out of the city. A man named Tucks sent for the colonel. He was groaning with pain and showed the colonel where the de Solas had branded him, for he was one of those who had stolen Don Esteban's horse. The Hounds rushed forth to kill all Mexicans.

In the Magnolia, Hales was asking Judge Deering to find and care for his wayward sister. Mr. Tesla was talking to them. A shot, obviously meant for Hales, came through the door. It hit Tesla. He fell down dead.

Hales and John Taylor, Anna Hales' younger brother, rode to inform Ilona.

She, Ferdinand and Kredra rode to the city.

"Who did it?" said Ferdinand.

"That gambler Dawes," said Kredra, an occult glint in her eye.

Ferdinand went to Dawes' room. He was gone.

After hearing the sad news, and quarrelling again with Hales, the colonel went to see Elvira. She insulted Ilona and he struck her and left her to nurse a vicious hate for him.

He found the city sick of bloodshed and arresting the Hounds who had murdered the Spaniards. He heard Judge Deering refuse to allow them to be hanged without trial. A committee of men went to arrest the colonel as a man identified with the Hounds. He took them to see Tucks' wounds and they released him as justified.

Elvira sent for Ferdinand.

"Apple of the Gibbet," she said, "why didn't you tell me that Colonel Nevinson had a woman at my rancho?"

"*My* rancho, you mean," answered he. "Because from now on I am my own man. No longer shall I dance at your word. I have served you long enough."

Elvira was furious.

Then the door opened, and Hales stood there.

"What do you want?" asked Hales.

"Anna is here and Colonel Nevinson is the man who ruined her," said Elvira.

But Hales saw through her.

"If you want your colonel killed you'll have to do it yourself," he said. "I'll see that my sister is taken care of." And he left her with Ferdinand.

Out of San Francisco, where they had liberated the arrested Hounds; away from the de Solas; away from Col. Nevinson who had offered five thousand dollars for their heads, rode Hales.

He came to Fan Fare Bar, a mining camp, where he found the miners were engaged in the trial of Benito and Lucita, José's fiancée. She had run away from home, and with Benito had set out to find her lover, but the miners had captured them and were trying them for the theft. Hales managed to save Lucita, but the miners hanged Benito.

Hales found a temporary home for Lucita at the home of Mrs. Gubbins, the hardy wife of a miner. Then he went to the main saloon of the place, Fred's house.

Fred's partner was a man named Black Perry who looked sullenly at Hales.

Hales received a letter from Judge Deering telling him that his sister was in the care of Mrs. Preble, the preacher's wife, and that he had succeeded in buying El Crucifijo, for him, which did not really belong to Col. Nevinson at all.

As he was reading the letter he sensed danger. He glanced around and saw Black Perry, a gambler and the bartender all creeping toward him. Two shots from Hales and Perry and the gambler were dead. He held the bartender for evidence.

The miners hanged the bartender.

HALES rode on to Diamond Gulch. There he learned that Don Esteban de Sola, José's brother, had been killed. Here had come Martin O'Day and his partner Bill Burton. Dawes was also there under the name of Clifton. Dawes stole some money and escaped from the town. The miners accused and hanged Martin O'Day as the culprit. Then Bill Burton quit the town and traveled with Hales.

They went to the mountain passes to help the immigrants across. They saved the lives of a Mr. and Mrs. Taylor who proved to be the brother and sister-in-law of John Taylor and Anna Hales

At El Crucifijo a group of bandits in the pay of the vengeful Elvira tried to hang Ferdinand, but Hales and Burton rode up in time to save him. Ferdinand took this as a reprimand from God for not fulfilling his vengeance and he set out to find Dawes.

Hales heard that his sister-in-law, Anna, had been lured from the Godly home of the Prebles by Elvira, and would be at a lascivious mask ball given at Monsieur Max's new dance hall. He secured a ticket.

That night there was much revelry at M. Max's. Every one was drunk but Hales. He had angry words with Col. Nevinson, and refused to dance with Elvira. Through the hurly-burly he could hear his sister's voice shouting vile oaths.

Elvira leaped to the middle of the floor and did a Spanish dance. For a while all watched her intently.

Then Hales, coming out of what was nearly a daze, saw that no one was watching her. He glanced toward where the others were looking.

ELVIRA, sinking breathlessly to the floor, ended her dance, her eyes on Hales. There was no applause. Some one snickered. Then many tittered. Angrily, Elvira looked to see what held their attention.

"Say, that get-up is good," said Kern. "He surely looks like the old man!"

"Take him off to the life!" cried another, and at once there was jubilant, yet from some slightly doubtful, laughter. A man or two clapped. Women squeaked in excitement.

The tall, bearded, masked figure, in long square-cut coat, with book in hand, was enough to make almost any one think that Ezekiel Preble himself had entered.

"That's makin' mock o' holy things," said a furry, pudgy bear of a man, half drunkenly and uneasily.

"Howdy, parson!" some one called to him.

"Just in time for supper, Parson!"

"Leave it to a preacher to get around at meal time!"

"He ought 'o have the prize, by ——. That get-up is good!"

Merry laughter. The maskers pushed into an admiring semicircle. They were curious, delighted with such a perfect take-off of the street preacher, who nightly damned them all—and to whom many gave their contributions, for didn't he have a wife and baby, and have to live?

"Well, Preble, we didn't expect ever to see you in a house of Babylon!" a man shouted.

Hales, after a moment's hard look at this person who seemed to have a daring sense of humor and some ability at acting, glanced through the jostling crowd for the poor tatterdemalion. He saw her, standing alone, half shrinking, staring, rigid. One hand was against her face, the other was half raised as if to push something away. This was no jest for her to be reminded of the preacher and his preachings. On her sick bed, and afterward, when feelings of real repentance washed her eyes, she had come to know Ezekiel Preble well.

"Well, Parson, let's hear you preach!" a fellow bawled.

The tall masker stared about with a ministerial solemnity, then slowly raised a long arm.

"Hi-oh," a woman giggled, "he *is* going to preach! Oh goody!"

Loudly, with strident reverberation, the voice rose—

"*Mene, mene, tekel upharsin!*"

His long arm swung toward the wall, he faced toward it; people too turned and stared, with giggles drying on their lips, and some asking—

"What's he talkin' about?"

And a man cried—

"No you ain't got old Jeremiah's voice, Parson."

Men laughed; women, some of them shrieked with laughter. Champagne glasses were lifted here and there, toasting him.

"Mock o' holy things!" mumbled a drunken man; but others thought it a good joke.

The strident voice boomed with gathering passion—

"As the fire devoureth the stubble and the flame consumeth the chaff, so cometh the vengeance of the Lord—"

The drunken maskers stiffened. If this was a joke it was not quite so good. That voice was too tremendously earnest.

"Who in —— are you, sir! Take off that mask!" cried Col. Nevinson.

As if the mask put on to obtain admittance had been forgotten, the preacher jerked it off, dropped it to the floor, and they looked into deep, black, gaunt eyes. This was no masker. A woman screamed—it was the tatterdemalion. Men swore doubtfully. A few laughed harshly. The gauze-girl cried with brazen jeering—

"Aw, what he needs is a good drink! Give 'im to me, I'll—"

"—destruction cometh as a whirlwind, distress and anguish cometh upon you, ye scorners that delight in your scorning—"

"Make heem stop eet! *Sacré* —— He spoil ze partee— Ow, *mon dieu*— Make heem stop—"

The voice of the preacher boomed through the wail of Monsieur Max, through the startled exclamation of revelers who simply did not know what to say. He stood gaunt and severe, challenging Satan in Satan's own house. The revelers were not greatly awed, but they were greatly astonished. It was almost like a joke, not on the preacher as they had at first thought, but on themselves. Some were uneasy, a little; some were indignant, and tried with sneering and mimicking to mock him. Mostly they simply stared and listened in a sort of perplexed amusement. But the mocking chatter, the undertone of astonished comment, the frantic spluttering of Monsieur Max were as the rattling of leaves to the voice of storm.

"I bring ye word of damnation. I have seen thy lewdness; ye women arrayed in purple scarlet color, and decked with gold and precious stones and pearls—the mark of Babylon is upon your forehead. Come down and sit in the dust—thou shalt no more be called tender and delicate. Desolation shall come upon thee suddenly—thine enchantments and thy sorceries shall not deliver themselves from the power of the flame—"

"See here, Preble, you're insulting these ladies!" cried Col. Nevinson, "and this has got to stop or—"

"—the lips of a strange woman drop as an honeycomb and her mouth is smoother than oil. Her paths lead unto death!"

"The old fool, ain't he ever going to stop!" cried a woman.

"Put heem out! *Mon dieu*, put heem—"

"Shut up!" said a bearded Pierrot without anger, putting a big hand to the back of Monsieur Max's neck and holding firmly. "Shut up. I like to hear a good sermon, and this, sir, is a fitting place and time!"

"—lift up your eyes to heaven and look upon the earth beneath, for the heavens shall vanish away like smoke, and the earth shall wax old like a garment, and they that dwell therein shall die. Oh ye fools and scorners, the wrath cometh! Turn from evil and fear not the reproaches of men, neither be ye afraid of revilings, for the moth shall eat them up like a garment and the worm shall eat them like wool. Repent ye, repent! The Lord thy God will bring destruction upon ye that walk in sin, and thy blood shall be poured out as dust, and thy flesh be as dung. Neither thy silver nor thy gold shall deliver ye in the day of wrath, but the whole land shall be devoured by fire and thy bodies delivered to everlasting hell!"

The dominant figure and powerful voice had, for the moment, imposed silence; and when his voice paused, every person within the room heard the low anguished moan of a woman. Heads turned, unsteady bodies moved about looking toward her. The masquerader in silken tatters was crying, crying with forearm to face. The mask had slipped and hung dangling at the side of her head. She pushed blindly at those before her, and as they gave way she stumbled by them, and sank at the feet of the preacher, with her forehead on her arm, her arm on the floor. Hers had been a religious girlhood and, now in reawakened shame, the words of the preacher had fallen upon her ears as words of warning and wrath spoken at her alone.

There was only the vaguest stir of movement, and there was silence; the revelers were now awed, and some held their breath.

The Rev. Ezekiel Preble did not appear in the least surprised; it was as he had come for just this, but with gaunt deliberation he stared about at the masked faces as if yet searching for one, some one among them; then the eyes of the beautiful Spanish dancer dropped as his gaze swung across her face. His sermon was done. He had answered the scornful challenge that came to him that day by note, saying the one for whom he prayed was in the house of carnival; let him come and get her. He had come; he had brought the warning of wrath and prophecy. Now he tucked his Bible under his arm, bent, spoke to the woman, helped her as she got to her feet.

She was covered with shame, the double shame of having been found by the preacher among drunken revelers after her many prayers and promises, and the shame of the contempt that she felt the drunken revelers now felt for her.

With his arm supporting her, the preacher led her off, out of the room, out of the House of Revelry.

The revelers stirred uneasily, looking from one to another, not knowing what to say.

"One of the best sermons I ever heard," said the bearded Pierrot with frank commendation.

"Mock o' holy things," the furry bear mumbled, shaking his head warningly at Kern.

Hales, with sudden determination, pushed roughly through the crowd. He was following woman and preacher. His very bearing showed that he was following.

"——, sir," cried Col. Nevinson, "if the Cuban señor isn't hurrying to the mourners' bench too!"

Some laughed.

Hales stopped, turned slowly, took a step forward, faced Nevinson; then took away his own mask. His eyes glittered under a frown, and it was written there that he meant to strike.

"—— -and-fire, *you!*"

"Yes!"

"And —— your soul, what is it you want, sir!" cried Nevinson, throwing up his head, squaring his shoulders, ready for a fight.

The impulse to strike trembled through Hales' arm. He wanted to strike, not a fist blow, but the stinging contemptuous slap that would mean seconds, a measuring of distance, the drop of a handkerchief, the word, "Fire!" But he did not strike; the Spanish dancer in a rush of breathless movement pressed near, stood hoveringly intent. He glanced at her. His arm relaxed. He turned and walked off hurriedly through the door.

Nevinson laughed scornfully, said something in a loud tone; but Hales did not clearly hear what it was, something about a "greaser."

XXIII

IN THE house of the preacher there was none who slept. Even the baby had awakened and wailingly protested against the bustling of the two hastily dressed women who moved about in the candle light. They were Mrs. Preble and Mrs. Stone, wife of the preacher who had a congregation and with whom the Prebles lived.

These women stripped the mask dress from Anna and put her into bed.

Mrs. Stone, who never before had seen such a vanity, lifted the dress of rags and colors from the floor, held it up at arm's length. The hem was heavy with mud. The slippers had been lost in mud. Anna had waded in stocking feet through mud until Hales had overtaken her. Mrs. Stone, eying the dress, said "Tut-tut-tut!" shook her head, flung the thing aside distastefully as if throwing it into the face of the devil. She picked up the child, tossing it up and down with swaying motion to keep it quiet, then went into the next room and began walking the floor.

Her husband had gone for a doctor. Hales and Ezekiel Preble stood in the room.

"You men can go in there now I reckon," said Mrs. Stone.

The preacher had been telling Hales of how he came to enter the House of Carnival. When he had got that challenge from the good Dona, he had gone to a saloon keeper and demanded an invitation card, in the name of the Lord— His voice again had the slow ministerial twang of pulpit tone reduced to conversation. He was a gaunt backwoodsman. Except when using Biblical phrases, he was wretchedly ungrammatical. Much of the Bible he knew by heart. There was an ungainliness about him. He did not belong between four walls, under a roof. A man of grammar and culture would never have gone on the street and preached from a whisky barrel before the blazing doorways of saloons.

He bore the name of a minor prophet. Fierce, wrathful, uneducated men, those minor prophets. In preaching he was on fire, sustained by the dignity of righteousness. The Bible thundered across his lips like curses.

Hales felt secretly a little ashamed at the dislike he had taken to him at their previous meeting in this house. What if his conversational tone did have a kind of empty monotonous loudness, and was nasal, his speech harshly ungrammatical? When it boomed at sinners it was not empty.

Almost every day he gave his strength and backwoodsmanly skill to some "brother" who was building a home, and would accept no payment. When he used the word "brother" he meant it. And the sweat of such a man was like ointment.

"—seventy times seven He has commanded forgiveness towards the errin'. An' Brother Hales, it's better to tear a soul like hern out o' old Satan's claws than save a hundred that ain't been so steeped in sin—"

Anna lay with sunken eyes in a wide mad stare. Mrs. Preble was washing her face, wiping away the paint from her bloodless lips, smearing the red grease, scrubbing. It clung like a blot of sin and would not come away.

The wretched woman talked incoherently, out of her head. She wailed, babbled, swore. Suddenly, insistently, she demanded drink—whisky.

"That's old Nick talkin'," said Mrs. Preble consolingly to Hales. "It's powerful hard to make him let go onct he's got a holt on ye."

To her the devil was as real a person as Hales himself. To the Prebles, Satan was no symbol, hell no allegory.

Ezekiel Preble knelt by her bed and prayed aloud, loudly, trying to cast out the devil.

The doctor came. Anna was wildly delirious. At times it took the weight of three strong men to hold her in the bed. "And," said the astonished doctor, wiping the dripping sweat from his forehead, "her heart is weak!"

At a time when she lay quietly, Hales turned away and looked through a window. He was not looking at anything. But as he watched he saw a strange glow; for a moment, hardly thinking about it, his impression was that this was an odd sunrise. Then, abruptly, a flame like the upward thrust of an archangel's sword arose.

"The city is on fire," said Hales.

Ezekiel Preble strode to the window, gazed a moment, then—

"Behold, the day of the Lord cometh, cruel, both with wrath and fierce anger, to lay the land desolate; and he shall destroy the sinners thereof!"

XXIV

IT HAD come upon the city, that dawn of wrath the street preacher had prophesied, and which every one had greatly dreaded; for all buildings were flimsy, there was no insurance, no water supply, no fire companies; but this morning, by great good fortune, hardly the slightest breath of air was astir.

As Hales hurried along through the street with men, running, many half dressed, it seemed the city has gone mad. There was a great din of gongs, bells, trumpets, a tumultuous shouting.

The fire swelled into a towering column; its roar was heard far out on the bay, and the glare of it in the murky dawn lighted up all the hills of the city. Amid the roar of the fire was the crash of timbers, as if the fire chewed, cracked and sucked the bones of buildings.

The fire had started in a gambling house known as Denison's Exchange. The flames spread to the rear and sides among the timber walls that filled the block, till a greater part of it presented a mass of flames. The heat was so intense that houses across the street, and farther, were scorched. Merchants in all directions were carrying out goods, piling them in the street, heaping them in the Plaza.

A burly, bearded man, ludicrous in a domino costume, pushed his way through a group that blinked helplessly toward the flames. Kern was a little drunken still, but he had an idea. He bawled at them:

"Get your shovels! Throw mud on the walls! Save these buildings!"

There was plenty of mud. A near-by hardware store was raided for shovels.

A merchant whose walls were being scorched by the still distant flames yelled excitedly:

"Water! Water! I'll pay a dollar a bucket! A dollar a bucket! Bring water!"

Water was brought to him, some of it dipped from muddy pools, and he paid one dollar per bucket.

Other men got out blankets, soaked them in muddy pools of the street, and in water that was carried to them, nailed the blankets to the walls.

But the flames continued to spread. They seemed sentiently furious. When one house was bursting upward with fire, the fire leaped out of the next. The roar was deafening. Large pieces of burning wood were tossed skyward by the upward rush of flames. Men held their breath for fear the wind would rise.

"There goes my store!" a man near Hales yelled. "Hey—I'm a goner! Hey, you there McCullough, you —— contractor. You built that store. How soon can you get me up another?"

"Thirty days."

"Too —— long. I got to get back into business—" He pointed to the store, now like a furnace. "How soon?"

"Say sixteen days?" asked the contractor.

"That's a whack. Come over here. I'll write a check to bind it!"

The man wrote his check, then shouted—

"Now I got to find Col. Nevinson an' bargain for lumber afore these other fellows get to him."

Hales stared after the hurrying storekeeper. Hales had heard men on all sides crying that this fire ended the city, that nobody would rebuild.

The famous Parker House burned. The notorious and brilliant El Dorado, a tent, went up in seething flames. The fire was spreading. It was now plainly seen that buckets, blankets and mud could not check the flames.

Kern, still in his domino, now covered with mud, caught at Hales, who was helping a man nail up wet blankets.

"Here, come over here with me," said Kern and half pulled Hales to a group among which there were many city officials. "Here, this is Captain Hales. He's one to help use explosives."

Hales was told, "We are going to blow up a row of houses over there—shut off the fire."

"Max's Golden House, it's in that row!" said Kern.

"Then it must go!" the man who seemed to be directing the fire-fighting said.

"Make sure to get all the people out," Kern exclaimed anxiously. "Some of 'em wouldn't hear if Gabriel tooted!"

"Captain Hales," said the one who was acting as fire chief. "Gunpowder is being brought. Will you take some men and blow up the Golden House!"

"With pleasure!" said Hales, making unconsciously a gesture very like a salute.

MEN with shouts and incoherent bawling were trying to make themselves heard above the roar of fire, the crack and crash of timbers; they swarmed like angry ants in and out of stores near-by, piling goods helter-skelter. Men with ropes, axes, picks, were turned loose on the frailer buildings, to tear them down, flatten them out. They worked as near the fire as possible, and beards were even singed. The draught that the flames created was like the roaring of a mighty wind through the forest, and the snap and crash of timbers like the rushing fall of trees, overthrow.

Hales led the half-dozen men detailed for the work, at a run.

Monsieur Max, bare-headed, alone, was on the stoop of the Golden House, jumping about frantically, waving his arms, looking across at the fire, cursing, trying at times to call men to come with water. As he saw the men coming on the run he thought they came to help him save his valuable property, and he began yelling instructions.

"Into the house!" said Hales to the man with him. "Get everybody out!" To Max, "Get what you can carry in one armful. We blow up this house!"

Max stood with bejeweled hands uplifted and mouth open. It seemed that sound would never come from that opened mouth, but it did, and as a howl. Then he broke into frantic cries:

"My beaut'ful house! It is ruin! Nevare! Monsieur, ——, nevare! Get ze water—ow I will not permeet—name of ——, son of a peeg—no! vache!—I will keel— Ow I will not permeet—"

Max was knocked aside and men burst into the house, passing through the small room where the attendants had taken tickets and weapons. Umbrellas remained huddled together like frightened things in a corner. No one was in sight. A few overcoats still hung on pegs.

With a rush like that of armed men bent on loot they entered the ball room, festooned with pine boughs in celebration of that holiday time commemorative of Christ's birth. The candles, almost to their sockets, burned feeble in the dawn. The room was empty. The wood on the big fireplace had burned down to only a bank of ash, soft and smooth as snow. Trampling boots of Hales' men crushed broken glass. Colored confetti lay thick as sawdust on a saloon floor; it was streaked and criss-crossed where the dancers had glided.

The inmates, who had been awake or aroused, had gone off to look at the fire. The Golden House had seemed very remote from the flames when the first clang of gongs and blare of trumpets arose.

The doors to the dining room were open, The broken meats of the drunken feast lay scattered about. High revelry had been here. Chairs were overturned, dishes on the floor, and bottles were scattered about. The festooned ribbands had been broken loose and dangled; and women's slippers were scattered. In the merry play women had stripped their slippers and thrown them for shuttlecocks. A small man, face down, snored under the table.

"Throw him out!"

He wore the furry garb of a bear. Stirred into consciousness by the jerking grab of rough hands he nodded sleepily, muttering—

"Mock 'oly thinsh—mock 'oly thinsh—"

The men went trampling up stairs, shouting loudly—

"All out— Turn out! Fire!"

Hales could hear them stamping, breaking through doors.

A frowzy girl, wrapped now in torn gauze, staggered across the room, blinking unsteadily, demanding—

"Whas up, hunh?"

She was not excited, but peered stupidly curious.

"Fire. The city's burning."

"'At —— preasher—he done it!" she said critically, looking about, uninterested, wearily. Then she dropped into a chair and reached with wavering hand, her head bobbing, for a wine glass. In trying to find her mouth with the brim of the glass she tipped it, spilled a few drops of flattened wine dregs, down her neck.

"——'," she said indifferently, and threw the glass, then fell forward on her arm, asleep.

She was young, blond, and if sober would have been pretty; her airy costume was in diaphanous rags. Hales grabbed her, shook her. She was as if lifeless. He lifted her, carried her out the back way, put her down. She fell. The chill air, or something, stirred her into life. She began screaming, cursing. She thought Hales had thrown her out of the house—thrown *her* out! Furiously, she tried to re-enter.

Two men came down, carrying a woman; behind them a man in masquerade staggered anxiously.

"Get off—we're goin' to blow up the house! Town's on fire!" one of Hales' men shouted.

The gauze girl then for the first time seemed to notice the fire, and turned, staring blankly, then stumbled off, half undressed, to where she could watch it.

Two or three others, men and women, dead drunk, who could not be stirred to life, were dragged out.

"What the —— can we do with 'em?" a man asked Hales.

"Carry them over there to one of those shanties. Break in. Put them on the floor. All out?"

"Think so. Here comes the powder."

Two men with a keg of powder between them were stumbling hurried up toward the rear. Here and there through the city the roar of explosions broke through the roar of fire like an answering challenging, as buildings were blown up.

Hales re-entered the house. A man was struggling with a small shepherdess. She had a very small red mouth. Her clothes were torn, her hair was down. She was crying, "I'll kill her! Ol' Span'sh ——!"

Madame Renault's names for the good Dona, who had left the party early, were unspeakably vile. As she was being hustled from the house she wailed her woe. She and the good Dona, who has been the best of friends, had that night quarreled. What over she did not say, being too busy swearing in English and French. Her small red mouth worked as if the lips writhed from the searing of her oaths. Fire, her own disreputable appearance, nothing affected her excepting her drunkenly remembered grudge. She struggled, clutching at a table, pulling the cloth, upsetting dishes, trying to stay and tell Hales of her quarrel.

"Throw her out!" said Hales, and men jerking roughly, dragged her along.

"Where do you want the powder, Captain?"

"In here. Up against the wall there. I wish we had ten kegs, but this will jar things up so we can pull down what's left in a hurry."

"Here's a hatchet, Captain."

They rolled the keg against the wall. Hales took the hatchet, chopping into it.

"Out yourselves, now."

The men stumbled off hurriedly, out the back way.

Hales took a handful of powder, sprinkling a train across the floor, then he picked up a candle that had burned almost to its socket. At that moment Monsieur Max, muddy and furious, charged through the front door, yelling:

"I foun' ze colonel—I ask heem—he say no! No need to blow up my beaut'ful house—out—go 'way! Bring water—an' we save heem, my house! Ze colonel—"

"Out of here!" said Hales!

"No! No! *Sacre, mon dieu*, monsieur—plees—ze colonel—he say it is for spite you blow heem up! Spite because you found zat filthy sister—"

Monsieur Max was to live a long time befor he was again as near death as those vicious words had brought him, for Hales, angered to the very depth of his nature, did not light the slow burning twill which he had twisted to communicate the fire to the powder train while he withdrew . He simply stuck the candle flame against the train of sprinkled powder itself, and with snapping crackle and smoky hiss the fire sizzled forward toward the powder keg. Monsieur Max with wild yells turned and leaped for the door and he was helped in his going by the explosion that flung him through the shattered timbers. Hales himself was knocked backward, half blinded, greatly bruised, among the wreckage.

Those who stood outside, at a safe distance, saw the side of the Golden House puff out, the roof shake, part of it rising upward, and shingles flew like scattered birds. The roar was dull, abrupt, like a solitary clap of heavy thunder, and black smoke obscured everything.

IN A few hours the city's first great fire was under control. By noon, having been hemmed in by men who tore down and blew up buildings, it had practically burned itself out. The loss was a million dollars. By the middle of the afternoon workmen were in among the smoldering wreckage, clearing it out, getting ready to rebuild. A month later not a vestige of the fire's blight could be found.

Twenty-four hours after the fire started, Col. Nevinson was again one of the richest men in the city. The exuberant city rushed at its rebuilding, and his dead elephant of lumber became like a lump of gold. Great rafts of lumber out in the bay and piled on the tide-lands were his. Even as the fire leaped at its highest, men searched for him to bargain for lumber. His luck was typical of the times.

XXV

TWO days later, toward the close of the afternoon, Hales, returned to El Crucifijo.

That morning, with a fog haze over the city there had been a funeral; four or five people gathered about a hole in a sand dune and left a wooden cross.

Hales in a bitter mood had left the city, with its thousands of feet moving about in a splattering trample of mud. The fire had been a stimulant. The value of lots in the burned area actually jumped with the charred wreckage upon them.

The farther he got from the city the more he began to feel the influence of the warm landscape's tranquility. The hills were green. The rains had been like wine to the earth. The trees were flushed with the glow of Spring.

He drew near the ranch, looking ahead to the squat, solid old buildings, brown and weather-worn. Here and there were traces of some ancient white-wash, and splotches where the adobe glaze of the bricks had been eaten off by the rain of many years.

Burton was on a bench under an oak playing mumblepeg with the two children. Little Pedro lounged lazily as a lizard against the adobe wall where the last glow of the sun fell.

Ilona came to the doorway. She raised her hand in a flutter of greeting and smiled in a way that he had never seen her smile before. Pedro slouched forward, grinning, touching his hat. Burton shouted welcomingly. Even Kredra, coming forward as if materializing from shadows, spoke quickly to him, with a smile. Kredra rarely smiled.

There was a warmth of pastoral domesticity in the greetings. It was like the homecoming from a far journey—so small a thing was the welcoming gesture of a woman's lifted hand, and her smile.

The isolated remoteness of the touch was made evident when Burton said:

"You had a fire. We saw the smoke. Burn much?"

"Not enough!" said Hales.

Pedro, who was famously lazy, now without waiting to be told, took Hales' horse.

"We expected you back for Christmas," said Ilona. "We set your place at the table, and a place too for Mr. Taylor's sister. Where is she?"

Hales then went to the house where the Taylors were living. Mrs. Taylor was still bed-ridden; but the kindness, the companionship, the quiet and rest of the old *rancho*, the green of the rain-freshed hills, all entered strengtheningly into her worn body, of which nothing appeared to remain but the shell of skin, the frame of bones, and the spirit that all women seemed to retain if they did not perish amid the miseries of the '49 pilgrimage.

Mrs. Taylor was asleep. Her husband rose quietly and came out of doors. He then or afterward hardly went farther than her voice would carry if she spoke. There was a sad anxiousness in his expression, and he said wearily:

"I know all you didn't tell me—the day John was out here, he told me. Everything. And *now*, where is she? You mean dead? Dead, poor child!"

So it was that the wayward and wretched Anna Hales, who without malice or wish had drawn so many people into the entanglements of anger, suffering, cruelty and mercy, passed from the scene.

XXVI

FERDINAND rode into Diamond Gulch on a big mule and stopped before the El Dorado saloon where a few idlers squatted, whittling and spitting just outside the door.

"Whar yuh from, stranger?" said a bearded man lazily.

"From the citee Saceramento, señor."

"Looks like somebody 'd been streatchin' yore neck a bit, pardner," said another voice good-naturedly.

Ferdinand absently felt of his neck, answering:

"The good God made it so, señor. It is another of his blessings for I can see if evil men they come behind me without turning my head."

A few notes of indifferent laughter followed, and then—

"Whar yuh goin', stranger, eh?"

"Go, señor? I have come far to be here!"

"Wall then that 's all right, f'r the only way yuh can go from here is back the way yuh come." The miner lifted his arm, and said, "Listen."

Ferdinand's head was still set a bit wryly on his neck, and he cocked his head slightly, listening to the prolonged organ roll of a mountain river, swollen by flood as it washed through the gloomy gulch.

"There ain't been nobody crost that there river f'r a week, an' nobody's goin' crost f'r some little time yet. Mr. Clifton he had some trouble gettin' crost on his mule an' she shore rained since then."

"Who, señor? Who?"

"The gam'ler fellow we had here in camp. He 'lowed he' d mosey on down to Hick'ry Bar an'—"

"Cleefton? The name—what was the man like, señor? Tall an—"

"Jes' a reg'lar gam'ler. Pale as flour, with a crippled hand."

"With a little mark too here on his face, Señor?"

"Never noticed."

"Yeah," added another loafer's voice, "he did have a little scar. Know him, did you?"

"An' he is gone, señors!"

"Over to Hick'ry Bar. 'Lowed he' d try his luck there awhile. 'Bout five mile down the river an' acrost. River's riz since then."

Ferdinand twisted about in his saddle, listening to the roar of the water as it washed over boulders and at the foot of rock walls.

"Wall, light down, stranger. We're pinin' f'r news, f'r news. Havin' any floods to Sacramento?"

"No, señor, I can not stay. I but stopped to res'."

"Whar yuh goin'?"

"To Heekery Bar, señor."

"Like ——! Yuh can get crost. No man c'd get crost!"

"I go, señor!"

"She' s shore deep an' swift. Yuh 're a fool," said another voice.

"For Mr. Cleefton I have a message. He will be at Heekery Bar!"

"Yeah. But a drowned man like you 'll be can't deliver much of a message."

"I do not drown, señors. No. I mus' go, now."

"Yuh don't look an indjit, but yuh are. We'll all go down an' watch yuh get drown."

Ferdinand dismounted and led his mule, The miners with stumbling tramp walked along near him, thinking that when he saw the river he would turn back.

The river with hurrying sustained roar swirled by. The waters were black, writhing with turbulence.

"Too much current. You can't never make it," they told him.

Ferdinand looked thoughtfully up and down the bank, then slowly climbed into the saddle and leaned forward, patting the neck of the mule. The mule, with ears stretched forward and head lowered, sniffed uneasily. Ferdinand spoke encouragingly and struck with his heels. The mule nervously advanced a slim foot, took another step, then drew back on its haunches.

"He won't go," said a miner.

"That thar jackass has got some sense. Most jackasses has if they ain't human."

Ferdinand bent over, stroking the mule's neck, talking gently; then, suddenly, he clucked, striking his heels hard against the flanks. The mule leaned forward doubtfully, and the soft footing gave way. The mule sank stubbornly to its haunches, but with forward glide slipped into the water and was instantly swirled out and under.

"He 's a goner—like I said!" a miner shouted.

A few feet below and well out in the current the mule's head reappeared, with Ferdinand out of the saddle but clinging to the horn. The mule with laborious plunging tried to turn toward the bank it had just left, then sank. A twisting current wrenched Ferdinand's hands loose. Down stream he went with a tumbling swirling movement, like that of bulky driftwood. From the bank the miners could see his arms swing in the stroke of a blinded swimmer, but fool that he was, he seemed trying to make for the far bank. He was jerked about, carried under, tossed down stream. The men on the bank, with a sort of fixed staring as they ran, followed down the river.

"He's gone!"

"Shore is!"

"There he is again!"

"Yeah, but the mule's gone!"

"He'll never make it—can't!"

"Ow look—look now!—Ow!"

Far down the river, where it gathered itself into a deep, narrow channel and with tumbling gyrating rush plunged like a tempest of waters, Ferdinand had been jammed into the branches of a fallen tree that lay down stream with its roots partly anchored yet in the earth of the bank on the side he struggled to reach.

He held on, gasping. The tree, shaken by the current, shivered like a tortured thing, and his hands could hardly hold. The water was like melted ice; it was, in fact, melting snow and the flood from icy ravines. The water pulled and wrenched at him with a sort of sentient sucking and jerk. The branches bent under his weight and pull of current.

The miners cheered. Their voices came dimly through the roaring of the water. As Death had learned, it was no easy thing to lay hold on Ferdinand; and he clawed himself up to the trunk, crawled along it, got to the bank, and tumbled weakly to a boulder, resting there.

The men were shouting, waving their hats. He could not understand what they said. Did not care. He raised an arm, answering. The mule had drowned.

THAT evening the idlers in the Yellow Gleam saloon of Hickory Bar drank indifferently, played poker listlessly, smoked, spit, yawned, and absently passed from hand to hand a dead man's fiddle which, like a dull sick thing, would no more than scream and wail when one of them laid a bow upon it. These fellows, made idle by the winter rains and flood, and also practically imprisoned in their camp, wanted music. None of them could play.

Ferdinand entered. His jaws chattered as he leaned against the bar.

"Wheesky, señor. Lots of wheesky!"

"Say, whar you from?" asked the bartender, tossing a cup to the bar and clapping a bottle beside it.

"I come from the Diamon' Gulch today, señor."

"You what?"

"I come from the Diamon' Gulch, señor."

"You're a liar!" said the bartender, without taking the trouble to make his tone even friendly. "Hey, boys, this here feller says he come from Diamon'!"

Men gathered up. A drunken man in a far corner, heavily leaning on a table, shifted his chair to rise, but the exertion did not seem worth the advantage of drawing near, so he held his head up for a moment, peering vacantly, then let it fall.

"You didn't come from Diamon'. Not today you didn't," said a miner. "I was down 'bout an hour ago. Had a look at the river. Last man that come through from Diamon' was that gambler feller—"

"Ah, you speak of Señor Cleefton?"

"Yeah. Know 'im?"

"By sight, señor, an' the leetle scar here on his face."

Some one had laid the violin near at hand on the bar. Ferdinand touched it with a lingering gentleness though his thoughts were far away.

"You play that thing? Most greasers do."

"A leetle señors, at times. Ah, Mr. Cleefton, he is here?"

"Now listen, stranger. You didn't come from Diamon'. You come from Simpson's Bar—over the mountain. She's as near hard as crossin' the river, 'cept it can be done. An' if you know that gambler by sight, like you say, you met him on the trail. He pulled out this mornin'. Some o' the boys bet even money he couldn't make it. Didn't you see nothin' of him?"

"He is gone, señor? You say he is gone!"

"What you tryin' to make us believe? That you come from Diamon'. You didn't!"

"But he *is* wet," said the bartender. "An' it ain't rained today."

"This trail, señors. This trail to the Simpson Bar—how do I fin' it?"

"She ain't no trail. She's jes' a way to get there since the river's up. Simpson she run out of grub an' a couple o' men come acrost to Hick'ry to tote back some flour. One of 'em he fell an' I guess he ain't hit bottom yet, bein' as that was only bout three days ago."

"But Cleefton, son of two ——, why did he go?"

"'Pears like you named his folks about right, pardner. He got hit purtty hard at monte an' las' night he up an' pays part in gol' coin. Him havin' a cripple hand the boys 'lowed he couldn't cheat much, so they bucked him hard. An' he pays, but he pays part in gol'. Now whar 'd he get it, hunh? They hung the wrong man over to Diamon' for havin' gol' coin sometime back.

Ever' coin was picked up an' put in a sack f'r emigrant relief, so whar 'd this gambler get gold coin? They was some remarks passed las' night, an' this mornin' he lights out. If we'd talked as much afore he went as we've done since, we wouldn't a-let him go. An' I guess he figgered we might do some talkin', so he'd better light out sudden-like, an' he lit."

The talkative miner was told to dry up. Men wanted Ferdinand to play the fiddle. Ferdinand, dead tired and chilled, wanted rest, but instead of thinking about rest he demanded to be shown the trail that led to Simpson's Bar.

"What? To night? In the dark? Takes a good man to make day-time job of it!"

"I mus' go, señors. Night or day, it is the same to the good God."

"Yeah. But not to a fool man. You 've gotta play. We 'll give you that there fiddle if you play."

"An' when I have played, señors—the trail, some man of you will show me?"

"A man that come from Diamon' crost that river, now wants to go to Simpson's, night time on that trail—Gosh, stranger, you must be crazy!"

"Yees, señor," said Ferdinand enigmatically, "when He drives man mus' go!"

"Crazy as a bedbug," said the miners, one to another. But play that fiddle he must. They ached for music.

Ferdinand first called for the fiddle's case, took out a bit of rosin, felt in a pocket, found extra strings.

They made him stand on the bar.

"She's shaky, pard, but a fiddler ort to stand on somethin.' "

As Ferdinand touched the pegs, bringing each string into tune, he glanced about, eying the men who eyed him. He knew the short temper of miners when a whim was denied, and play he would, but not for long, whether or not they wished it.

Having made a few quick strokes of the bow over the rosin, he raised the violin and tucked it under his chin, letting the fingers of his left hand for a moment run noiselessly over the strings. He raised the bow, and with a soft caressing touch drew it slowly over the strings, and the men heard sound so faintly that they bent nearer, straining to catch the magic whispering of the tones that, even as they strained for them, grew stronger, dancing with subtle nuance, rising, dying, rising again, touched with fury until the rushing tones seemed the wings of eerie things in wayward flight.

The miners stared one at another, wonderingly; and, abruptly, the tone changed to a major melody and Ferdinand glanced searchingly about at the faces of those who listened, trying to guess how soon he would dare put an end to this.

With the slightest pause he raised his hand and in a whip-like stroke brought the bow crushing down upon the strings; chord after chord followed in whirling succession, and a brilliant ascending scale rose to the highest tones. Then he gave an almost imperceptible glance at his listeners, and the skilled hand of the player swerved slightly and the ferrule on the frog grazed the E string.

The snap of a broken string was heard. Ferdinand gave a glance of dismay, then thrust out the fiddle at arm's length for all to see the dangling frayed string.

"An' señors, I had jus' got myself warm to play!" he said with a sound of disappointment in which, subtly, there was a weary note, very much as though he mocked them.

WHEN the miners saw that Ferdinand was touched with the madness that would, in spite of advice and warnings, make him try the perilous trail in the night time they became, though a little contemptuously, sympathetic. They had no lantern, but broke the bottom out of a bottle and gave him candles. Also, because he asked for it, they gave him a piece of rubber blanket in which to wrap the fiddle case. Then two or three men went out to see him fairly started up the precipitous trail in the darkness.

Ferdinand went forward alone. He tempted himself with the thought that he might save time by waiting for dawn, but he did not dare wait. His was a tremendous strength and patience, the patience that had gnawed him out of many prisons, that with stroke of muffled file, a movement at a time, night and day, had eaten off galley irons. The trail seemed to run with abrupt twists at the edge of a narrow ledge. Often he peered over his candle, but on one side, precipitously, was darkness and when he tossed over a stone he sometimes could not hear it strike. There was one fortunate thing, anyhow. One could not be misled. There was only one way to go—unless one slipped.

A musty grayness sifted through the sky, and objects outlined in bulk, as solid, began to show details of form. Dawn was coming and he was still climbing.

In the dawn he paused and looked about. Well that he had been careful and wary. In places the very rocks over which he moved seemed loosened and ready to fall. A slight fear touched him that the gambler and his mule had slipped from the trail; and Ferdinand felt suddenly a sort of respect for this Dawes if with a mule he had come over these rocks.

Overhead the clouds hung low. The air was full of moisture, the surface of rocks damp. In the distance he could see that it was raining. It looked as if the garments of the clouds had been caught against three tops of the mountain sides, and as the clouds drifted onward they left between themselves and the earth a moving misty column that was rain.

Simpson's Bar was smaller than Hickory Bar, almost insignificant. Diamond Gulch because of its fabulous, if temporary wealth, had been different, with an unsubstantial air of permanence in the sawed lumber of many buildings. The wealth of the river had dwindled as it went downstream.

The only hotel in Simpson's Bar which, in its decadence supported now no other place for gambling or drinking, was a one-story structure, built of unhewn saplings, covered with canvas and floored with dirt. It consisted of one undivided room in which the tables, bunks and benches were all arranged. There men slept and ate and drank. Four tiers of bunks, one directly above the other, were built against the walls by means of upright posts and cross-pieces, fastened with thongs of rawhide. The bedding was a small straw mattress, about two feet wide, a single blanket, and a pillow of straw. Men might go to bed in their boots, but it was regarded as bad taste to sleep in one's hat.

Ferdinand entered the hotel about nine o'clock. Breakfast was long over. There were seven or eight men about, a few growling lazily in idle talk, some hung at a table over the flip and shuffle of greasy cards. One, a whisky sodden bummer, dozed fitfully with head down on his arm. This fellow, by some obscure abbreviation of his name, was called "Abs," as if his christening had been Absalom, which it may have been. He had that morning pawned his pick for a bottle, the last thing in the world that he owned. He, who had never been liked by the miners, was now held in contempt.

Ferdinand paused in the doorway and stared with eager searching; then—

"Señors, the gambler man an' mule—he is not here!"

"Ow, hello there, stranger! Whar you from? That gambler he lit out firs' thing right after breakfas'. An' he did sort o' look up yonder along the trail as though he expected somebody to be along after him."

Ferdinand swore. They did not understand his oaths, but they knew he spoke in oaths.

Dawes, made uneasy by the suspicions that had been aroused among the miners of Hickory Bar when he paid his gambling losses in gold coin, had passed on quickly from this camp, in case the miners from Hickory should decide to follow and lay hold on him for further questioning.

"I don't know where that gambler thinks he's goin', 'cause s'far as we know there ain't no more camp on this side the river, but he took some bacon an' truck an' lit out. We ain't much grub to spare here at Simpson's, but that fellow had a ten dollar gol' piece which shore took our eye. Here she is!"

Woods, the man who owned the hotel, showed the gold piece.

Ferdinand asked for food. They brought him cold black coffee, beans and pork. There was no bread or flour in camp; and as he ate wearily, with a far-off look in his eyes, they asked questions.

"What yuh packin' there?"

"A feeddle, señor."

"Fiddle! Oh gosh, I ain't heard music seems like since I was knee high to a duck. You've got to play."

"Another time, señor. I will be back soon. Is there a mule? I have gol'."

"Nary mule or hoss in camp. You're after that gambler feller, ain't yuh? What's he done?"

"Oh señor!" said Ferdinand, mildly reproachful, and drawing out a well-filled pouch. "I owe to him a leettle debt. An' an hones' man he can not res' or sleep till his debt is paid!"

Silence followed this remark; then a miner spoke:

"Yo're right, pardner. It ain't none o'

our business. Ever' man looks out for hisself in Californy. But I tell you this much. That there gambler acts like he was expectin' somebody along after him."

Ferdinand tossed his pouch to the table toward Woods, the proprietor; but the proprietor shook his head, saying:

"Nope. You play us a piece instead. That's what us boys want. We're hankerin' f'r music."

"I mus' go, señors!" said Ferdinand, again indicating the pouch.

"Yeah, but yuh've got to play a little something first," said one, and others with a kind of feverishness added their voices to the demand.

Ferdinand, realizing that the quickest way to obtain his departure was to do as requested, unwrapped the case, took out the fiddle, took a string from the case pocket and was busy when the half drunken Abs, roused by the interest the miners were showing in this fellow, came forward with lurching steps. He caught himself against the table, looked down at the well filled pouch, cocked his head with drunken interest, then glanced at Ferdinand.

Abs peered steadily, with great and hazy mental effort, then lifted a wavering accusing hand and bawled:

"Thash him! Thash him fell'rs! He robbed me lash summer—nigh S'ñora! Thash him!"

Ferdinand in the act of raising the fiddle to his shoulder, paused, rigidly alert, searching this fellow's bearded face with an intensity in which for a moment there was menace.

The miners with sullen doubt eyed Ferdinand, with now and then a glance at Abs.

"An' thish 'ere 's mine!" cried Abs, snatching at the buckskin pouch, but a heavy-handed miner gripped his arm, shook loose the pouch, cast Abs' arm aside.

"Don't be in no such of a powerful rush!" said the miner, at the same time staring hard and unfriendly at Ferdinand.

"I do not know of why he plays the joke except it is he tries to steal my gol'," said Ferdinand with an air of innocence, and the next instant his bow touched the strings.

A moment later every man with hovering tenseness listened. The strings were almost articulate; the slowly drawn tones fell upon the listeners like a chorus of solemn voices. These lonely camp-imprisoned fellows, three thousand miles from their hearth-fires, bent forward with unconscious bowing to the strains of "Home Sweet Home."

Ferdinand, in his wanderings through the camps, had seen how deeply, how always deeply, the rough sudden-tempered miners were moved by that simple melody, which he himself did not at all understand; but, as with almost every thing he heard he could play it and, like a magician with a wand, evoke the ache of home-sickness.

The last note floated off with a lingering faintness that left nothing perceptible between its dying and the coming of silence. Here and there a bearded face had turned aside and rough hands made furtive movements toward the eyes.

"Thish 'ere 's mine!" cried the drunken Abs, breaking the music's spell.

A miner struck him aside. They had all heard Abs tell many times of how during the summer near Soñora he had been robbed by greasers; but Abs was something of a liar, and it was now too, too plain that what he was after was the gold.

"You jus' wait a minute 'r two," said the miner.

"Señors," said Ferdinand quietly, "if you wish to hang me so your freen' can have my gol', do it queek, pleese, because as you know I have the hurry to be gone."

"Friend! He ain't no friend of ourn!"

Woods, the proprietor, opened the pouch and sprinkled a little gold dust into his palm. Nearly all merchants, and many miners, could tell from what district gold came. It was roughly classified as scales, grain, flour, shot, wire, pea, bean and seed, and the dust from one district might not be worth as much as that from another, which when assayed, showed alloy of silver or copper.

"This ain't Sonora dust," said Woods indifferently, just as if he had known all along that it would not be Sonora dust.

"It ain't nothin' new for Abs to lie!"

"Tryin' to get a feller hung to get his pouch!"

"We ought to hang him! He can't stay in this here camp. Let's give him a good hidin'! You, Mr. Fiddler-feller can lay on the whip!" Then, with a sort of afterthought, and a hard stare, "You didn't ever rob him, did you?"

"I, señor!" demanded Ferdinand with mild reproach, then, without another word, as if half idly, the bow drifted across the strings.

Abs, afraid of these miners who did not like him anyhow, and half drunken, mumbled apologetically, saying:

"I guesh he ain't the fell'r. I—I made mishtake— Greashers all look 'like—thash other fell'r played guitar—thish fell'r fiddler. Ain't shame fell'r. Skusch me, mister—I wouldn't toush thish gol' what ain't mine."

FERDINAND, setting out in the direction that the miners pointed, for a time could follow the tracks of the mule. This thrilled him. He hurried. But soon the low-lying mist congealed into falling drops. The rain fell quietly, as if without malice. The rain was noiseless, but the trees dripped water, and the river with tempestuous cadence gave off the organ roll of mountain flood.

The river lay impassably on one hand, the wilderness of the mountains deepened on the other. By following the river one would eventually come to shelter, where men were or had been. There was no trail. It was rough and hard climbing over boulders. He hurried anxiously, many times feeling that the mule and rider could not have passed this way, dreading lest they had turned off into the mountains. Lost there, they would perish; but the mere perishing of the gambler Dawez would give no satisfaction to Ferdinand. He felt no fatigue, forgot that he had not slept, had no thought of food. From time to time he fingered the handle of his knife and muttered words in the ancient tongue of his fathers.

Long before night, darkness began to lay itself in deepening purple mists in every depression and mountain-side ravines. The rain continued. He began to think that night would force him to dig a hole under a rock for shelter, and knew that when he paused his body would be filled with the ache of weariness. Ferdinand swore, blaming the devil.

Abruptly he came to where an old trail crossed the river. Miners who spread out searchingly in every direction had passed this way. Beside the track was a part canvas cabin, now dilapidated.

In the gathering darkness he sniffed woodfire. People lived here. Some miner-men. Good! He would sleep and eat and ask if a man and mule had passed. He approached near and listened. There was no sound within. The hurrying roar of the river drowned his own footfall. He peered through a slit of the canvas and saw vaguely a form within, near the fireplace, and sniffed the odor of bacon. Ah, good! He brought a stomach with him.

He walked around to the cabin door and shouted heartily.

"Oh ho, my freend, a lone traveller, an' los' in the mountains! I bring a hunger that would eat a wolf cub while it is the bitch looks on an' snarl!"

Within, vaguely blotted against the fire, was the crouching form of a man who held a strip of bacon over the smoky flame of the fireplace. Except for the small space illuminated by this smoky glow, it was dark within. The man had his face toward the doorway. Nothing of his features could be seen. There was a kind of fastidious awkwardness in his attitude, as if he was about dirty and unfamiliar work.

The stick dropped from his hand. The bacon fell with prolonged sizzling. The hand had moved.

"Who, sir, are you?" demanded a quiet, cold voice.

Ferdinand knew that the fellow spoke with hand on gun; but he came forward, stamping heavily, shaking the water from him, answering:

"A fiddler-man that goes from camp to camp. I have leetle to eat, señor. But candles—I have the candles!"

With an air of bustling good cheer, Ferdinand looked about for a place to put down his fiddle case. There just within the door lay something. His foot struck it—a saddle. He pulled a candle from his pocket and, with a flourish of carelessness—"all day I walk los' in the rain, señor—" drew near the fireplace and thrust the candle's tip against the fire. He had squatted too in lighting the candle and now the flame fell on a thin, pale face—suspicious, wary. Ferdinand felt this man, with hand on the drawn gun at his side, was half-minded to shoot just as a matter of precaution.

Ferdinand pretended to notice nothing. Humming carelessly, he stood up, turned his back, and sheltering the candle with his palm went to a broken-down bunk at the side of the room, dabbed grease on a crosspiece and set the candle in it. Then he returned to the fireplace, squatting down beside the man, saying—

"The good meat it is burn—ah!"

The fellow, partly reassured by Ferdinand's ease, glanced at the fire; and instantly with a swift quiet movement, Ferdinand's hand closed on the gambler's wrist, twisting his arm. The gambler, with his other and crippled hand snatched futilely at Ferdinand's fingers for a moment, then fell away.

Dawes did not cry out. He looked steadily at Ferdinand's odd grin, then coolly but blasphemously demanded what this meant.

"Up, stan' up, Dawez. I will tell you ever'thing, ah ho, yees!"

"Dawes! I am not Dawes, sir!"

"Bah-bahbahbah!" said Ferdinand cheerfully, rising, and in the painful grip of his strong hand, Dawes arose too. They stood almost breast to breast, the gambler pale, slim, nerveless; Ferdinand, shaggy-headed, dark, twice as broad, perhaps ten times as strong.

Ferdinand took the derringer from the gambler's fingers and tossed it out of the opened door, far into the darkness; then, fumbling under Dawes' coat, drew the bowie knife from its sheath and flung it away. He released Dawes' hand and laughed oddly.

"What, sir, is the meaning of this?" demanded the gambler, looking hard at Ferdinand. "I never saw you before. I am not Dawes. I have been mistaken for that man before—"

"Eh? Not Dawez?" said Ferdinand, mockingly.

"No."

"The leetle mark here, eh?" Ferdinand drew a forefinger along his own brow.

"Other men have scars. And the scar of this man Dawes is much plainer and on the other side of his forehead. Why do you look for him?"

"It is for you I have looked, señor."

"What have I done—or Dawes."

"You keeled Mr. Tesla!"

"No," said Dawes quietly. "And *who* told you that?"

"God, señor."

Dawes parted his lips as if to speak, but closed them. He could not very well call God a liar. Imperturbably he stared and wondered; then—

"I have heard of this Dawes, but you have wrong man."

"Eh?"

"That is the truth, sir."

"You are from Diamon' Gulch?"

"Yes."

"Dawez was there?"

"No. He was not there. I was mistaken for him. My name is Clifton. Dawes did not have a hand like this?" He extended the crippled hand which had brought upon him so much misfortune in that it had reduced his gambler's skill to mere luck, and bad luck it had been. "Dawes was never at Diamond Gulch."

"Ho-o-oh, señor. The leetle man that was hanged for gol' he did not steal, he wrote a letter—he tol' that you were there. That you were Dawes!"

"What sir!"

"Eh, what? Ha! Now are you Dawes?"

"No. The fellow simply mistook me for Dawes. He was a thief and—"

"What a tangle you make of ever'theeng with that tongue," said Ferdinand, being troubled by a little maggot of doubt. "He was no thief, that leetle man. An' you—at Heekory Bar they wonder why you have the gol' coins. You steel an' let heem be hanged? It is so? Bah Dawez, this is why I follow you!"

Ferdinand drew his knife and put the point to the gambler's throat.

Dawes moved slightly but not enough to stir from his tracks. The light of the room was dim. The unfed smoky flames of the fireplace were dying. Ferdinand's eyes were piercingly watchful, but he could not detect the least guilty change of expression. A sound of fear, a confessional movement or word, and the life of Dawes would have ended. But the gambler played for his life. He stared fixedly. There was the glancing glint of candle light on his eyes, and his eyes were steady.

Firmly he spoke—

"I am not Dawes."

"You lie!" said Ferdinand in anger, but he lowered his hand, and loosely thrust the knife into the belt. He simply did not dare kill the wrong man, for his oath would then be unfulfilled. And the gambler knew that he had won enough doubt from this strange man to be safe for the time being. "I will take you—day an' night I will take you to one who knows. She will say. Ho, then we shall see."

"Who?"

"Kredra the Wise."

"Who, sir?"

"Kredra, who knows hidden theengs!"

Dawes recalled the balcony of the Magnolia, the dark woman who had opened the door to his knock, the name Kredra spoken in a clear voice from across the room. Now he answered—

"I shall very willingly accompany you, sir."

"She tol' me Dawez keeled Mr. Tesla an'—"

"I too have heard so, sir. But I am not Dawes."

"Kredra will know. I take you to her. An' if you have lied, I keel you twice!" said Ferdinand looking from the corners of his eyes at that crippled hand.

He thoroughly believed that this was Dawes, but it would be terrible to kill the wrong man, not so much because one candle-like life was blown out, but because of the oath.

Dawes looked at him steadily for a time, then, quietly:

"Yes sir. I shall accompany you, readily, wherever you wish. That man Dawes has caused me enough trouble. I shall be glad to have this matter cleared up. Now, sir, I may finish my supper?"

"Eat," Ferdinand ordered shortly, then backed to the bunk near the candle. He leaned against the bunk and thoughtfully watched the gambler, watching for the least little confessional movement of fear, or flight.

Dawes stooped down, picked up the charred stick on which he had been toasting his bacon. He looked at the point, laid down the stick.

"I have sardines and more bacon there in my saddle bags. You will be good enough to slice the bacon for me, since you have taken my knife."

"Get it," said Ferdinand indifferently.

Sullenly he watched Dawes who unhurriedly crossed to the saddle.

Dawes knelt, fumbling. He pulled a can of sardines out, carefully laid it on the ground. He used only his right hand. He removed a small bundle, like a rolled up soiled shirt.

On his knees with his back to Ferdinand, Dawes spoke—

"I have not much to eat, but such as it is I shall share with you."

He glanced over his shoulder at the dark figure, who sagged heavily with arms folded against the upright post of the bunk at the other side of the room. Ferdinand scowled sullenly, but did not answer.

Dawes then stood up, turned and leveled a large revolver. He did so with a smooth quickness, without the jerkiness of desperation or anger.

Ferdinand's arms dropped as he stiffened, straightening, poised in astonishment, tricked.

"You are Dawez?"

"Yes!"

Dawes answered like a passionless executioner; he straightened his arm, slightly, steadily, inexcitable as at a target.

There was a blurr of movement at the side of Ferdinand, and though Dawes shot at once it was dark within the room before the bullet had left the gun. Ferdinand, with a backward sweep of hand, had knocked over the candle.

Dawes fired again at the vague swift moving form that seemed to pass between him and the dim glow of coals in the fire place.

Then there was a slight throaty sound, like a restrained muffled exclamation of surprize, a slow shuffling movement, quickly ended, the soft fall of something that sank struggling, the faint creak of leather; then silence.

The rain fell with interminable dripping, and the measured plop-plop of the leaks in the roof continued. The dirge of the roaring river reverberated through the solitude as the froth-fingered waters played tempestuously at the organ-walls of rock.

Within the cabin seconds became minutes, long drawn, and there was no movement.

"He is dead," said a voice, quietly.

A form uprose warily, then footsteps moved. A figure stooped to the candle, white, visible on the ground. The candle was thrust into the coals, stirred with breath.

The wick lifted up a doubtful trembling flame. Then the man, guarding the candle with a sheltering hand against the draft of motion, crossed the room and held the flame low, near the ground. For a moment it was moved about, searchingly then its glow fell across a pale thin ascetic face, mask-like.

"God did it!" said Ferdinand humbly.

His knife, consecrated to the Oath and thrown in the dark, had taken the life of the man Dawes.

XXVII

THE Rancho El Crucifijo lay in a siesta-like stillness.

The afternoon was warm. No one was moving about. Little Pedro dozed against a sunny wall and dreamed of fiestas, dark girls moving amid a tempestuous swirl of gay skirts, handsome tall men prancing merrily to the tinkety-tink-tink of strings. He dreamed so intently that, though his eyes were open—for if one sleeps, reveries are useless—that presently he heard the music, faintly; actually heard it, as if it came elsewhere than out of his own head. Pedro was dimly mystified, too pleased, too warmly comfortable, to stir. Then—

"Eh?" said Pedro, and sat upright, listening.

He rubbed at an ear, cocked his head, listening.

"Mother of Saints! It is a miracle!" said Pedro, looking up at the sky, for the music floated about him so faintly that it might well seem that he caught the dropping notes of a happy invisible procession that passed over head.

Then it ended, died out, was gone.

"Ah," said little Pedro, staring, thrilled, uneasy. "All things have meaning, and was it wrong that I heard!"

He crossed himself and remembered some sins that he had better carry to a *padre* and tell.

Then it came again, those sounds, nearer, stronger, and with a voice too, singing.

Little Pedro forgot saints. He knew that voice. He scrambled to his feet and ran around the corner of the house; and there was Ferdinand, coming among the oaks, on a mule, and fiddling away like a troubadour made mad by spring, and singing.

Unless there was danger to his life, Pedro would rarely run; but now he ran, waving his arms, shouting welcome.

"Ho—oh, Don Turnip! I am home! The sun makes herself merry to see me! What news!"

"No news, señor, but that you are home! I thought I heard Saints—and it was you!"

"The same, one an' the same, Señor Lazee-bones. Oh ho, Dona Ilona—she is happy?"

"*Si, senor.*"

"An' Kredra frowns in silence, the same? Eh?"

"Ah, señor, she puts what I eat out of doors, as one feeds a dog! Make it, señor, that she forgets what was all the fault of that —— of a muleteer!"

"That you eat at all, Turnip-top, shows the wise Kredra has a good heart. But you shall see that she smiles an' has no more the frown. An' Señor Hales?"

"He rides much with the blessed Dona, an' looks at her, so!"

"Ah-a-ha!" cried Ferdinand. "So it is come to that, eh! Well, Sir Turnip, where is there a better man than he—excepting here!" And Ferdinand patted his own broad breast.

Then Ferdinand struck up his fiddle and lifted his voice. Pedro ran ahead to cry the news that Ferdinand was home; but his own voice brought out the people before Pedro got to the doorway. Hales stood apart, rolling a cigaret. Burton waved his hat. Ilona, indeed glad to see him, called merrily.

But Ferdinand answered no one. He sang, full-throated, with a varied tumbling upward rise of tones; the bow danced upon the strings. It was as if he were indeed a wandering player, and would pass his hat for pennies. The fiddle-case, tied to the horn of the saddle, dangled like something captured. He had no other belongings; and the mule was not the one on which he had ridden away.

His roving eyes looked repeatedly within the doorway. Again and again he looked; then Kredra was visible, dimly visible, well back from the doorway, watching. He was chanting strangely of rivers crossed, of mountains climbed, of men defied, of steel that sped in darkness. She watched, bold-eyed, listening; then withdrew as a shadow vanishes into deeper darkness.

When she re-appeared again it was from around the house. Ferdinand had dismounted, and now was talking to everybody, waving an arm. He made them laugh. Even Kredra smiled readily. Little Pedro hopped about with proprietory happiness.

They went into the house, trooping in. Kredra brought a mug of wine. Ferdinand flung his hat—not the one in which worn when leaving—into a corner, shook his head, throwing back the tangled hair. He dropped into a chair, spread his arms wide, and talked.

Like all far travellers, he was full of news and talked freely; and like many another of them, he did not tell the truth. He joked, laughed, drank more wine; then, suddenly, as if just remembering a little incident of his travels, said:

"Oh-o-oh, señors, that gambler Dawez, it was heem that stole the gol' coins at the Diamon' Gulch. Ho yees, señors! Poor leetle man that was hanged. But ho! The miner-men, they fin' out! Yees, yees, an' Dawez he tried to run away. Yees, yees! Weeked men they have no luck, señors! Now to show how hones' men like Ferdinand are love in heaven—this same Ferdinand—" he patted his breast— "he fell into the deep beeg river, an' the mule he drown. But God put a tree there for Ferdinand. Yees! Dawez? Before he die, talk? Ho-oooh yees, he talk enough— Yees. More wine, pleese, Kredra of the good heart. A dry throat it is silent."

XXVIII

ILONA had told Judge Deering that she expected to return to Europe as soon as it became late enough in the Spring to expect a calm voyage; and Judge Deering, consulting his conscience, had confided with her the whole tangle of El Crucifijo's ownership, and of Hales' search for the unfortunate woman, Anna.

Kredra, who knew hidden things—which, however were not so deeply hidden but that little Pedro had perceived them—was quite skeptical about Ilona's leaving California. And after Ilona's return from her last visit to the city, though she said nothing of what Judge Deering had told, Hales felt a subtle intangible warmth in her attitude toward him.

A day or so after Ferdinand's return, John Taylor came out from the city as he did every week to visit his brother.

"Nothing has been heard of the de Solas. Col. Nevinson says they have been frightened out of the country," Taylor told them.

"Rain and bad roads," Hales answered, "make highwaymen and bandits seek shelter, like other people. While José de Sola lives, Nevinson will be in danger of death."

The next morning Burton, who had some business in the city, and Taylor rode toward San Francisco together. They had not reached the public road before they met a *vaquero* riding on the way to El Crucifijo. He was merely the common sort of Spanish Californian on a very good horse. The fellow was small, dark, with a quick eager look on his face, and a gentle thin voice. He wished them a "good day" in English.

Burton, without drawing rein, looked over his shoulder at the fellow, trying to recall where, if ever, he had seen him before. There was, somehow, a glimmering of familiarity about the *vaquero*.

Pasquito, the *vaquero*, rode on without looking behind him. He recalled very well where he had met this giant of a gringo. Pasquito one night in the mountains had crept cautiously forward to the camp-fire of two Americanos while Don Gil Diego and his horsemen waited. Luck had been with the gringos, since one of them was that Señor Hales against whom even the savage Don Gil would not raise his hand.

Pasquito knew that Col. Nevinson talked in big tones of how he had broken up the de Sola bandits. What fools were these gringos who thought that Spanish blood ever forgot or forgave the humiliating blow, or ceased to wait watchfully.

With such pleasant reflections to entertain himself, he rode on; and now and then he smiled in much the same way as smooth water is rippled without being broken.

Under the shadow of the oak before the rancho of El Crucifijo, Ferdinand stood in the road and cried his greeting to Pasquito:

"Ah-ho, señor Pasquito, you are far far out of your way, my good friend. But come, if you are hungry. There is coffee and meat, and the welcome of an honest man. Then you tell me where it is you go, and I will point my finger to show you the way. You are lost, eh?"

"No, señor, but my horse needs the rest of a day and a night, and I come to where is a good friend, like Señor Ferdinand."

"So fine a horse! Rest! He has too much fat and should be rode fast and far," said Ferdinand with the air of a man who knew all about horses. "Ride him hard, señor. That is the cure for such lazy-bones!"

"No, Señor Ferdinand."

Ferdinand frowned doubtfully, then with less amiability—

"What do you hear?"

"Don Gil Diego he said to me, 'Pasquito, when you are tired, stop and rest at the *rancho* of our good friend, Señor Ferdinand, whom I love'."

"The —— take that same Ferdinand and those who love him," said Ferdinand, not loudly, being very impatient at having further dealings with men whom he wished to forget. Then, loudly enough, "Why are you here, señor?"

Pasquito lied plausibly enough for his purpose, saying he was tired; and Ferdinand knew that he lied a little; but as it could not be helped he hoped for the best and said:

"Come then and rest. But if you would live long and die happy, keep from sight. There are gringos here."

"How many?" asked Pasquito quickly.

"Ho, many! They come and go."

"Be it so, señor. I must wait."

"Wait?" cried Ferdinand. "You must wait? For who and what?"

"For the brave Don Gil, Señor Ferdinand."

"Don Gil! Here! He comes here. Ho, there is danger! He must not come!" Ferdinand swore with deep feeling. "When does he come?"

Pasquito, who was neither a fool nor the son of a fool, rather distrusted Ferdinand, though having been very well assured that Ferdinand was a true fellow, one to be counted on; and so Pasquito lied:

"Two days from this night he rides by. And I am to wait here, with news."

"News, what news, señor? I am a friend. You can tell me!"

"Tonight, Señor Ferdinand, when all is quiet, I will tell you, señor—all."

Ferdinand went along while Pasquito put away his horse in the corral, then took him to the kitchen, fed him, talked, pulling with oblique questions and subtle friendliness; but Pasquito was wary, and a very good liar; which, together with his ability to speak English, was why Don Gil placed him in considerable trust.

Hales, crossing from the Taylor house which was some distance off, met Ferdinand Pedro and Pasquito; and after looking at Pasquito for a moment said:

"My honest and lone traveller, you are far from the mountains? Are you lost again and wish the shelter of a gringo campfire?"

"Si, Señor Hales," said Pasquito, grinning frankly. "When there are so many bad men in the world, I come near to those who are good!"

"And do you mean to stop long?"

"No, señor. Tonight I go, far, very far."

"You," said Hales, "have a bad habit of getting lost when your friends are within voice-call. Where are they now, these friends?"

"Don José has taken his wife—God love her!—to Mexico, that he may be far from all gringos. Don Gil rides south. There are too many Americanos here. They come like flies at the time of taking hides."

To the Spaniards, before the gold rush, a cow was worth no more than its hide and tallow. Thousands were killed and skinned and left to the coyotes, buzzards, flies.

When Hales had passed, Ferdinand said:

"You lie well for an honest man, Señor Pasquito. Now let us have the truth."

"Tonight, señor, when all is quiet. My story is long."

FOG-LIKE clouds lay nearly motionless in the sky. There was no rain in them, but they obscured the warmth of the sun.

That afternoon, after shivering by the fire, Ilona asked Ferdinand for the horse, Prince. She looked about for Hales, meaning to ask him to ride with her, but he was not to be found readily.

She loved to ride, and was never lonely on horseback. She wore the divided skirt used by Spanish women in California, and often had ridden far toward the hills, alone, and had never seen any one, never thought of any one.

The ground was springy with moisture, soft with fresh grass. The horse flew with noiseless hoofbeats; and she rode the finest horse she had ever known.

The wind whipped against her face, and though by a fire she had felt chilled, now there seemed a moist warmth in the air. Her blood raced, and she was merry, all by herself.

She had gone several miles, then in a roundabout way returned toward the ranch. After a swift gallop she pulled down to a walk, and rounded a hill. Below her lay a narrow gully.

"Come, good boy, jump!" she said, stroking the horse's neck.

But Prince, with ears thrust forward, paused, looking off to one side.

ILONA looked, and saw a group of many men, some ten or twelve, staring at her in attitudes of surprize. Some still squatted, but others had sprang upright, staring. They were Spaniards, wild looking fellows. Here and there on down the gully she saw horses, grazing against the bank. The horses were unsaddled.

She was startled, but not afraid. They were two or three hundred feet off; she was on a fast horse, they were afoot. The ranch was less than two miles away. She could hear their voices rattling in startled exclamations.

"Come, Prince-boy," she said quietly, and struck him with her heels.

The horse was inattentive. He looked with eager pricking of ears and out-thrust nose toward the men and other horses. Usually, after her lightest touch she had to draw the reins, firmly. She struck him sharply with the ends of the reins, and he gathered himself for the jump, but at that moment a clear shrill ringing whistle seemed to fill the air. The horse jumped instantly, and nearly jolted her from the saddle, for he had jumped straight down, and bolted furiously toward the men who sprang, scrambling, out of the way; that is, all excepting one thick-bodied, savage fellow with black bristling mustache. With jolting abruptness, the horse stopped before him, and head out-thrust, ears pointed, nuzzled against the upraised hand, while the man looked up at her with an expression of mock surprize, his eyebrows lifted, his mouth shaped as if to say, "Oh!"

Ilona was angered and a little frightened. The expression on the faces of these men made her uneasy. Three or four of them were scrambling up the bank. They scattered to high ground and peered in all directions, then shouted back that no one was in sight.

The fierce looking man, plainly their leader, walked from side to side, examining the horse like a cautious buyer about to make a high bid; and the horse tried to follow every move and step that the man made.

"Señorita," said the man unpleasantly, "who are you?"

"Señorita Tesla—" she spoke Spanish—"and you are on my *rancho*, without my permission!"

This was not strictly true, but under the circumstances she felt privileged to say it. There were low explosive murmurs all about her; and this man's eyes widened. Then he smiled, but with a hint of mocking her, and removed his sombrero. His voice was harsh, like the voice of one habitually contemptuous.

"And *my* horse, señorita. How is it that you ride upon him?"

"It is not your horse, señor. It is Col. Nevinson's horse!"

"Ah, it is, eh?" Again the fellow's ugly face took on the look of mock surprize. "Do you think this horse would come if the gringo whistled, eh?"

"Perhaps not, señor. But I wish to get home. If there is a misunderstanding about who owns this horse, you can find Col. Nevinson at San Francisco. Please step aside, señor!"

Don Gil stepped aside, bowing ironically.

Ilona struck with her heels, with the reins, clucked sharply. The horse, reluctantly, started forward, but, as Don Gil whistled, wheeled instantly and came up to him. Don Gil laughed at her.

Ilona was flushed, confused, and gave him so angry a look that he said:

"Oh señorita, your eyes are like the dagger! If the horse loves me more than the colonel gringo, why should you be so angry?"

"Will you kindly allow me to go, señor!"

"Señorita," he cried with an air of wrath, "the man that would stop you with hand or word—ha! Let him beware of me! Out of the way there, you! The señorita wishes to pass!"

The men, grinning, edged off a little.

"May I go now, señor?" she asked far more coolly than she felt.

"This is your *rancho*, señorita?"

"It is!"

"Ah. We lost horses that wandered, señorita, and in the search came here. The day is nearly night, and hungry men eat supper. If it is not pleasing that we camp on your *rancho*, we leave, now! Eh, señorita?"

"Of course you may stay, señor. And may I go?"

"One little moment, señorita. You do not know how this colonel-man got to own my horse? No?"

"No, señor. I have heard that there was some trouble, and though I have permission to ride him, I was asked not to ride him to the city. But I know nothing beyond that. May I go, now?"

"Pardon, señorita. One little word more. This man, is he a friend to you? A very good friend, ah? Better than a good friend, eh?"

Ilona flushed indignantly.

"My friend, señor, yes!" she said angrily.

"Ah—" Don Gil's voice was contemptuous, his inference unmistakable—"but he has other friends, not like *you!* The Dona Elvira, you know of her? Eh? Ha, I see anger! Go, señorita, as you wish, an' we too ride at once from your *rancho*."

He stepped aside and pointed. She urged the horse, and the horse moved with hesitant steps, then, not being called, went faster, but as if half-minded to turn anyhow. She coaxed him up a place in the bank that afforded footing, then urged him into a gallop.

The ugly Spaniard's last words and tone echoed within her ears. She did know, vaguely, of the Dona Elvira, and did not want to know more than vaguely of her.

XXIX

ILONA reached the ranch in the first gathering of dusk; and as she rode up at a clatter she noticed two horses tied near the house, and wondered, without much thought about it, who had come.

Ferdinand, as if he had been hiding as he waited, stepped from behind a tree and ran toward her. She jumped off, swung the reins at him, saying—

"The strangest thing happened to me over there. I met—"

"Queek! On your horse. To the corral ride! The strange theeng has happen here —queek!"

He cut short her questions by seizing her as if in anger and lifting her, and when she was in the saddle he slapped the horse, which sprang forward, frightened, and in two jumps was past the house.

Ilona, in passing, glanced at the wide doorway. Candles were burning and she saw vaguely a man's tall figure moving toward the door.

"Has she come? That was Miss Tesla, wasn't it?" a voice demanded peremptorily through the gloom.

"*Si, senor,*" said Ferdinand agreeably. "She rode to the corral and comes back."

The man's figure withdrew, then Ferdinand, flinging his hands up in a gesture as if resigning to Heaven all responsibility for what might follow, began to run toward the corral.

As he rounded the house he saw a small fire burning and two silhouetted figures moved idly near-by, tossing on straw.

He changed his course and ran to the fire, demanding—

"What do you do, eh?"

"We make a fire to talk by, and tell the news, señor," said Pasquito. "The night is not warm and my story is long."

"He will tell his story to us," said Pedro.

"Your story, bah! I have my own story this night! And yours is not long, Señor Pasquito, if it can be told by a straw fire. You, Turnip, come and take your señorita's horse. Do you sleep when I talk!"

"I come, señor. I come!"

He followed with a stumbling trot to where Ilona, almost invisible in deepening of night, impatiently waited.

"Take him the horse!" said Ferdinand, shoving the reins against Pedro, then shoving Pedro.

"Ferdinand! What is wrong? You, why you are excited!" she grasped his arm, trying to peer at his face.

"Nothin' it is wrong, Leetle One. I know you do not want to stop an' see who it is there, so I tell you to come here. Go to where the seek woman is. Write a leetle note. Say you will not come to the house. I will take it."

"What do you mean, Ferdinand? Who is there?"

"That colonel."

"Col. Nevinson! Why, I *do* want to see him. And why shouldn't I see him? I had the strangest thing happen a while ago and I—"

"No no, you mus' not go!"

"Why, Ferdinand? Why?"

He was shaking his head vigorously, but she could not see that—

"No, you mus' not!"

"I want to see him. I really do. Why, you act so strange!"

"No no, he is not alone. You mus' not go. No!"

"Who is with him?"

"May the —— fly away with heem, to bring that woman here! Ah, she is bad, Leetle One. Do not go near! She is the Evil One, an' make troubles. I do not know why she comes, but I know why I weesh her off! E-ah! It is bad. She is a bad woman, Leetle One!"

"He has brought that woman here?" Ilona demanded, amazed, indignant.

"An' how to be rid of her! There is the wagon an' mules, with some straw—when she got from her horse she sleepped an' could not walk. With her arm to my neck, between that colonel an' me, she got to the house. She say, 'Oh oh, it hurts!' an' I say, 'Oh oh, good!' but quietly to myself. She, oh one I love, she put the men here to hang Ferdinand, but does not know I know! An' how she looked at firs' to see me! Do not go!"

"Ferdinand!"

"It is truth! I have tol' lies, but nevare when God watch an' listen as he mus' watch an' listen this night to see what the Devil has in the stew pot! You mus' not go!"

"What can he mean, bringing her—here!"

"You write the leetle note, eh?"

"*No!* I will go and see. Where is Mr. Hales?"

"He is with the seek woman. From far off he saw that colonel come. He went into the seek woman's house. He has hate for that bad Dona. He is no freen' to that colonel, an'—"

"Go tell him that I want him. Quickly. Run!"

Ferdinand made all the protests that he could, but she would not listen, and imperiously commanded; so, with no pleasure in his haste, he ran, and came back with Hales.

"Mr. Hales," she said, "Col. Nevinson is here, and with a person I have no wish to meet. But I shall go and hear what this means. I am *not* afraid, but I—under the circumstances, I would like for you to come with me. It is almost cowardly of me—but will you come?"

IT WAS now as dark as any hour of the night would be, and that cloud-haze, which is called a high fog and obscures much of the Californian spring-time sky, blotted the stars and the moon. The heavy buildings were perceptible as solid blocks of darkness; the candles within made faintly luminous squares at some of the deep windows. The kitchen door was open. A candle on a high shelf threw a glow on the floor and barely across the stone that made the threshold step.

On the ground, between the house and the corral, all that was now left of the bonfire was a glowing disk. The straw with rapid flare had burned. There were no silhouetted figures near. Pasquito and Pedro had withdrawn.

Ferdinand followed Ilona and Hales a few steps, then, seeing some one cross the kitchen, he ran ahead.

The Spanish woman who had been brought from somewhere by Pedro as a cook sat phlegmatically on a low three-legged stool and indifferently eyed the supper, now ready and warm.

Kredra stood near the inner doorway, looking through, motionlessly, into the other room where Col. Nevinson paced up and down and the Dona Elvira sat in a chair, holding a slim hand to her ankle. The colonel waited restively, turning expectantly at every sound, now and then solicitously asking Elvira how was the pain? And did she not think she could sit in a saddle, if they rode slowly, in returning?

"Kredra? Kredra?" Ferdinand called softly from outside the kitchen door.

Kredra turned unhurriedly, without change of expression. Even the focus in her eyes seemed set, so that though she looked toward Ferdinand she did not look at him.

"Kredra, Wise Woman, tell me, what do you see? What will come?"

He waited breathlessly, confident.

"There is nothing here," she said calmly, touching her breast. She shook her head slightly. "There is nothing here, so I have no fear." But her air of mystery was not lessened.

"But you know something—can see—can tell—"

His faith was the faith that would believe anything except that this sibylline woman did not know, could not see at least a little way into the hours that were coming.

"Ah, Kredra, Woman of Wisdom, you know something. Tell me."

"That man"—she hardly moved a hand, but conveyed the suggestion of having pointed—"is a fool!"

"Yes, yes, it is so!" said Ferdinand, nodding rapidly.

"She has no hurt. She feels no pain," Kredra continued impersonally, having for some time watched Elvira, unobserved.

"Ah, you know that? Then why—why does she make the cry and limp? She put her arm to my neck—I could feel her pray for the strength to break it! Why did she slip and say it hurt?"

And Kredra, who could be very expressive when she looked upon one whom she did not like, answered enigmatically—

"Her lips have the curve that a serpent leaves in the dust!"

"It is so!"

"E-ah! They have come!"

She turned quickly from Ferdinand and again stood where she could look within the room beyond.

Ilona and Hales had reached the doorway at the front of the house.

For the past few weeks what went on at El Crucifijo had been as far removed from Col. Nevinson's knowledge and attention as if it were situated a hundred miles off. He had, when nearly bankrupt, and with no other impulse than one of generosity, given what he thought was the ranch to Miss Tesla. He had done so because he knew that in bankruptcy he would lose it, and because when a generous impulse—as with any other—came to him, he followed it.

Subsequently, he and Dona Elvira were reconciled; not only reconciled, but his attachment for her was stronger than it had ever been. But he was no sooner securely infatuated, than she began, though with too much subtlety, to risk a quarrel, to reproach him for having never given the ranch to her. His explanations were ineffectual. With a woman's heedless insistence, Elvira wanted, or pretended to want, that ranch.

She insisted upon his taking her out to El Crucifijo and getting it, as if it was something that could be put in a purse and carried off. Her original idea may have been to dispossess and triumph in a way that would have pleased her over Ilona Tesla. Not even for Elvira herself would Col. Nevinson demand the return of his gift; but he had heard through the business gossip that attended the settling of Mr. Tesla's affairs that Ilona expected to return to Europe; and he did promise that he would call upon Miss Tesla with a view toward regaining possession when she left. This did not please Elvira, and at first she let him understand that it did not please her; but he was firm. Then she insisted upon accompanying him; and to this, reluctantly, he agreed. After some delay she had named the day, and he kept his word.

He was standing before Elvira, regarding her ankle with a kind of exasperation when Ilona came to the doorway and stood there. He turned quickly, graciously, but paused. Plainly she was angered. Also she appeared somewhat taller than Col. Nevinson remembered her, as if she had grown rapidly. She looked at him and at no one else. As far as she seemed to know, he was alone.

"Ah, Miss Tesla, I—"

He glanced past her and forgot the rest of his greeting. He recognized Hales with just about the same puzzled stare that he would have recognized a ghost. Hales' face, in the outer edge of candle light, appeared a face of shadows and angles. Nevinson had at first to look carefully to be sure that it was Hales.

Elvira, also recognizing him, made a noiseless gasp. Her dark eyes for an instant took on an abstract look of troubled thoughtfulness. It was as though vaguely she was afraid of Hales, or at least of his presence here at this time. His presence, and his attitude, was unmistakably one of protection toward this Tesla girl who stood haughtily, with face lifted, totally ignoring her.

Elvira arose with agitation, casting startled glances about her as if suddenly and greatly alarmed.

"Colonel," she said quickly, her voice anxious, "let us go! We came on a matter of business, but—"

She had arisen. Her dark face of cameo outline was strained; the soft Spanish glow of cheek and brow was gone. She was suddenly pale, and broke off with an odd expression of listening as if to some far off faint sound.

"You tremble, Elvira!" cried Col. Nevinson, turning to her. "The pain—your ankle. Sit down. We—" he glanced toward Ilona, who, whatever her impulse may have been, had not yet by so much as a glance recognized the presence of Elvira— "we will soon state our business, and if you can bear the pain, go!"

He also was angered by Ilona's hauteur and Hales' presence; but, being Col. Nevinson, would not go with the reason for his coming unstated. Solicitously and forcibly he pushed Elvira back into the chair.

She was strangely excited. Her slim hands fluttered with nervous groping from the arms of her chair to her cheeks, then snatched vaguely at him.

"Please—never mind anything—let us go! Quick, please—"

"No," he said sternly, not unkindly. "No, madam, I came for a purpose and until that purpose is stated, I do not go, sir!" Then, "Miss Tesla, this is my friend, my very good friend—" he said it sharply—"Miss Elvira Eton!"

Ilona took no notice at all of Miss Elvira Eton; but from behind her direct gaze she asked—

"You have something to say to me, Colonel?"

Losing his temper and manners he said explosively—

"I desire to buy this ranch from you, now!"

"No—no!" Elvira cried in a low tone, almost hysterical, arising again, looking at no one. "No, I don't want it, Colonel! I want to leave—we must leave—something terrible will happen—oh quickly—"

She took a hasty step and stumbled on the hem of her riding skirt. Col. Nevinson caught her, supported her.

"You must not try to stand," he said peremptorilly. Again she weakly yielded to his hands, and sat down, but begging:

"Please take me! We must go—now. My ankle is all right—I—we must get away from here—Oh, oh, oh!"

Ilona answered him, and there seemed a proud note of satisfaction in her tone:

"El Crucifijo does not belong to me, Col. Nevinson!"

"Then who—what have you done with it?" he demanded, but his gaze shifted suspiciously toward Hales.

"It belongs to Mr. Hales, who bought it from the de Coronals! Though called Cowden's ranch, it was never Mr. Cowden's to sell!"

"He, that greaser there—he told you that!" cried Col. Nevinson. "He lied. You sir, if you say that, you lie!"

Dona Elvira groaned as if struck. Her hands flew to her eyes, pressing them. It was as if suddenly she valued Col. Nevinson his friendship, his generosities. And as he spoke Nevinson made a sweeping gesture, pushing aside his coat, reaching toward his hip, glaring at Hales.

Hales, with fists clenched, folded his arms. His anger burned like a flame in his browned face. The word, "No! No! No! No!" fell like a repeated steady blow within his brain. He was greatly angered, but in his heart he did not actually blame Col. Nevinson for his astonished rage. Buying El Crucifijo from the de Coronals, and saying nothing, had been like a trick. He was not now proud of it, though unashamed. For the moment he did not dare try to speak.

"Do you hear me, sir! I say, you lie, you —— greaser!"

"Sir!" Ilona spoke with a sharpness that even Col. Nevinson could not ignore. Then, "I refer you to Judge Deering who—"

Hales, standing so tensely that he hardly gave thought to what he was doing, looked quickly behind him into the darkness where there was the sound of feet. Dimly he saw figures, two or three, approaching and glimpsed their Spanish dress. Pedro, Pasquito, he thought, coming to listen.

"Colonel! Colonel—oh go—let us go—"

Elvira again started to rise; but there was a confused sound of heavy feet, an explosive flurry of voices, seemingly all about the house, at all the doorways. With a low cry she dropped back, her hands flattened against her cheeks, her eyes in a stare.

And at the instant that Hales knew these were other men than he had thought, he felt the jab of something blunt against his side, and as his hand snatched at his holster, he felt his gun jerked away.

"Do not move, señor!" a voice in Spanish told him.

And as men rushed by him, pushing by Ilona, there was also a hurrying clatter of feet through the kitchen, and six or seven wild *vaqueros* came into the room.

Col. Nevinson, looking determinedly toward the front doorway, stepped back rapidly, reaching at his hip under his coat; but the first Spaniard to enter from the kitchen was the savage Don Gil, with mustache bristling; and before Col. Nevinson realized that anyone was so near behind him, Don Gil caught at his shoulder and laid the muzzle of a revolver against Col. Nevinson's forehead.

"Oh, ho-ho," said Don Gil mockingly. "It is the brave gringo colonel, eh? You are a brave man, eh? Good! Soon Don José de Sola will be here to ask why you make of his brother's head a peekle! This is a good night!" Then, as if throwing the words into the air to be obeyed by anybody they happened to strike, "Tie his hands!"

And, as more than two or three men already stood by, eagerly menacing Nevinson, Don Gil turned away with a swaggering air of indifference.

Hales had been marched into the room with the muzzle of a gun in the middle of his back.

"Ho oh! Señor Hales!" cried Don Gil. "Ah, this it is pleasant. Stan' right over there, señor, where you can watch well. Ha! These women, out with them—" Don Gil flung his hands as if scattering flies—"into a room an' watch them." But as Elvira with trembling stagger started to rise, her face averted, Don Gil caught her by the shoulder, pushed her back. "No no, not you!" He spoke in Spanish.

Nevinson swore and struggled, crying:

"Keep your hands from her, you dirty ——! Don't you dare—"

Don Gil turned slowly and looked at him, then he moved his eyes slowly and looked at Elvira who sat crumpled in the chair, pressing her arms to her face, her body trembling. Don Gil smiled a little, very slightly, nodding his head slowly, watching her. In Spanish, "Man is a fool. Even now he would fight for you!"

Then Don Gil, with a wrinkling of contempt still on his lips, turned slowly toward Hales, and by the staring in Hales' eyes saw that Hales knew that this woman, with much artful scheming, had revengefully betrayed Nevinson into the hands of these men.

"It is our promise that he there shall never know," said Don Gil, with arms folded and staring aslant at the wretched woman. "Ha!"

XXX

DON GIL, with sombrero pushed back and a cigaret in the corner of his mouth, sat on a corner of the table carefully examining Hales' revolver. He had daubed candle grease on the table near him and stuck the candle there. Near the candle was a bowl of moist black sugar. Sugar was a weakness with him, and he had demanded it; and now from time to time dipped his fingers into it.

Ilona and Kredra had been taken from the room. Dona Elvira, with her face bowed to her hands, wept.

Hales stood against the wall behind the table. No one was near him. *Vaqueros*, fingering their weapons, slouched with attitudes of mingled laziness and alertness at the doorways.

As Don Gil examined the gun or dipped his fingers into the sugar and nibbled absently, he would lift a slow oblique glance at Col. Nevinson, just as if to make sure that he was still near-by. His hands had been tied with a reata behind him, and some feet away a man held the other end of the rope. Nevinson stood erect and, for once, silent. Shadows of haggardness were already on his face, and more than at anyone else, he looked at Hales.

Don Gil, who had a gift for all sorts of torture and a kind of ironic contempt for everybody, sat with studied delay, nibbling sugar, fingering the revolver. He grasped the handle, pointing it at his own head, closed an eye, stared into the muzzle as if seeing something. Then he handed the gun to Ferdinand, saying in English—

"Give eet back to our good freen'."

Ferdinand walked around the table and held out the gun to Hales, who hesitated, then took it.

"Now I know—*you* have done this!" Col. Nevinson thundered at Hales. Oaths followed.

Don Gil looked up obliquely, watching Nevinson, listening, amused. He twisted about, with sugared fingers on the way to his mouth, and maliciously said in English:

"Ha, Señor Hales. He does not like it that you are our freen'."

And Hales, answering in Spanish, dropped his hand, indicating the returned gun and said, "You have done me the greatest injury you could do, Don Gil. It will be believed everywhere that I, *I*, have done this thing—or had a part in it. It is known that this man and I are not friends. If I try now in any way to make him believe I have no part in it, he will think more than ever that I lie!"

"So? Then, señor, if you would be treated like a devil-born gringo," said Don Gil with increasing anger, "whip a Spaniard! Steal their horses, pay men to kill them, harm their daughters, take their land, curse them for dogs, call them *greasers!* Does it mean nothing that I, I, Don Gil Diego, who hate all Americanos, have respect for you—and show it? Bah?" he cried, flinging his hands. "You too are a fool! I thought long and twice before I gave the gun back to you so that he might see and know you were my friend. Now no more words! I do here as I please—" With a sweeping gesture, he indicated the roomful of armed *vaqueros*.

Col. Nevinson, still glaring at Hales, cried—

"You don't even deny it, you—"

"Hol' your mouth tight! All you! Ever'body!" Don Gil bellowed.

The situation, however, was too satisfactory for him to remain angry, and his nature too mercurial. He tossed more sugar into his mouth, gave an up-turning twist to his mustache, then having a new thought, said pleasantly—

"Ah-o, you Ferdinand!"

"Ah-o-ho, Don Gil," answered Ferdinand.

"My horse—on this *rancho*? You did not send word? You, what devil's trick did you play?" Then, growing really suspicious and angered as things he had not thought of came out as he talked of them:

"This colonel-man, you help him hide my horse! You help him hide from us! You knew it was this colonel when we did not—and you said no word! That tongue of yours, here, now, I will cut it out if you lie! Let me hear truth, and why you helped this colonel, eh? Answer!"

Don Gil frowned wrathfully. He liked Ferdinand, but he hated traitors.

"Ah, Don Gil, bravest of men, Ferdinand is a sailorman. He knows a horse has four legs and two ears; but a horse, señor—I ride mules. One horse, it is to me as another. There are many horses with the same mark on his hide. I do not know, Benito was here and saw the horse, señor, and—"

"Benito is a dead man," said Don Gil, suspiciously, "and cannot tell me if you lie. Gringos hanged him. He would know my horse and tell me! Yes, that is a lie! Ah-er-r-r, you lie!"

Ferdinand made a gesture of mild protest, answering:

"What a wicked world, that when Ferdinand speaks truth, good men like you, señor, say, 'you lie, Ferdinand!' Then ask your man Gomez why, why when he came with Americanos to hang Ferdinand and the horse stood where a blind man must see—though a sailorman like Ferdinand does not know more than to tell a horse from a mule—why Gomez when he came—"

"Gomez! Gringos? Hang you! What bigger lie is this, now?" Don Gil roared.

"No lie, no lie, señor. Only the bad luck that an honest man has when he speaks true! It was Señor Hales who came and saw and eased my neck with that good gun of his. He stands there. Ask!"

"Does this man lie to me?" Don Gil demanded of Hales.

"No, Don Gil. So far as I know, it is the truth."

Don Gil swore furiously. He forgot the horse in his rage:

"Gomez? Hang you? Why Ferdinand? Ah-h-h, now I remember me that he did have his horse go lame yesterday when we rode this way! I will make a fire and put him to sleep on the coals! Why? He came with Americanos! I hate *all* Americanos! Why was he here, my Ferdinand?"

Ferdinand hesitated, glancing toward Elvira, who, though already in misery, looked up with anxious wretchedness, and shrank as if from an expected blow, for she saw that he knew. Ferdinand answered:

"My gold, Señor Diego. He came with robber-men. Gringos! But for Señor Hales they would have hanged Ferdinand! Gomez was here. Your horse was here. Gomez has eyes! Let him lie to you, good Don Gil, and see if his lies can make you believe him!"

Don Gil swore savagely, questioning Hales, asking many questions, cursing Gomez, threatening a couch of live coals against anybody who would lift a hand against his good friend, Ferdinand.

When that was over, Don Gil looked about as if for something else that might be of interest; and, with his eyes on Col. Nevinson, called—

"Pasquito!"

"Pasquito is outside, on watch, señor!" some one said.

"—— and his mother! I called Pasquito! Not for reasons why he does not come!"

One, then another of the men by the doorway quickly repeated the call. There was no answer.

"I will get him," said Ferdinand and went out.

Pasquito came humbly— "You call me, señor?"

"Ho, so? You come when it pleases you to come, eh?"

"I watched for the coming of Don José, señor."

"Then why does not Don José come?" said Don Gil, angrily.

"Ah, señor, as you know, Don José waited on the road if it should be this gringo left before my watch-fire called you to him."

"He should come. He should come," said Don Gil impatiently. Then—

"Our little ramrod, Pasquito. Bring it!"

Pasquito hurried out and returned with a flexible steel ramrod.

Don Gil threw down his cigaret, took the ramrod, bent it between his hands, then, striking the air, made it whistle.

"Ha!" said Don Gil explosively to Nevinson. "Eet is hungree for the taste of a gringo back. Put eet on the fire, Pasquito. See, the brave gringo grows white in the face! Ho, do you fear a leettle burn, eh—like a woman?"

Col. Nevinson did grow white; but awaiting what was almost worse than death, he had not yet begged. Don Gil wanted that sound in his ears—the gringo's begging cry. But so far every time he tormented Nevinson into saying anything, what he said was blasphemous and defiant. Nevinson's virtues may not have been many, but cowardice was not among his weaknesses.

A FAR-FLUNG shout was heard outside in the darkness, a dim answer; then the trampling rush of horses over the soft moist earth. Don Gil sprang out into the room, then stood poised, listening with the wariness of an animal used to being hunted. The other men, half ready to bolt, with hands to weapons, listened uncertainly. Some one, peering into the night, cried out reassuringly, turned with a gleeful flourish of hand—

"Don José comes!"

Don José came. At his back were four more *vaqueros*, eyes bright and mouths parted in grins over white teeth.

In the doorway Don José paused, looking about, fastening his gaze on Col. Nevinson. His youthful face, within a few months, had become severe. He was the avenger, more passionless than Don Gil, who got pleasure from torture, but as merciless.

Don José said nothing until he had looked carefully; but those with him talked rapidly to their friends. They said they were late in coming because just about dusk a party of soldiers, mounted men, had ridden along the road toward San Francisco. Don José had waited there a long time. He knew that Don Gil would have caught Nevinson soon after dark; so Don José waited lest these soldiers, having word that he was in the neighborhood, might reappear and in their search ride toward El Crucifijo. In that case, Don José, whose horses were better than Americanos', meant to lead them a chase, draw them off. The news that soldiers were near troubled the *vaqueros*, for though the gringo soldiers were not remarkable horsemen they were amazing marksmen.

Don José turned a slow look upon Elvira, running his glance from the hem of her skirt over her huddled back to her hair, now pulled loose, partly bedraggled.

"She weeps well, eh?" said Don Gil. "Yow-yows to make him think she has sorrow. It is the way with—"

Don José cut him short with a quick slight gesture. There was no doubt as to who was the real chief, and the blood of the higher caste commanded with the ease of one born to the command of such unruly rough fellows as Don Gil.

With great surprize and a moment's doubtfulness, Don José recognized Hales.

"You, señor! Ah, even revenge must wait on a Spaniard's debt for kindness!"

Don José removed his sombrero, coming to Hales, putting out his hand.

Nevinson's voice, brokenly, almost too enraged to shape the words, cried out that he had known it from the first that these two men were friends, in league; but they ignored him, and Don Gil struck his mouth.

"Señor Hales," said Jose with emotion, "Dona Lucita is now my wife. She waits with friends near Los Angeles. This night I ride south, and with her on to Mexico. Of all who are gringos to you only would I give my hand. In her prayers for me, señor, Dona Lucita gives your name to God who this night gives me the pleasure to meet you again. As he hates, so does a de Sola love one who has been so much the friend as you. But the night may not be used for even the talk of friends. Soldiers have been near here today."

Then Don José turned at once and coldly, "Strip his coat! Unbind his hands. Spread him across this table!"

Elvira sprang up, begging, a hand outthrust, crying:

"Oh no! Oh don't! No—Oh!"

"You act it well! You act it well!" Don Gil shouted at her though hardly glancing toward her.

Pasquito came running with the ramrod that had been thrust into the fire of the kitchen stove. Its end glittered for a moment, white hot. The men had untied Col. Nevinson's hands, three men to an arm, and more ready to help. He struggled with a sort of writhing; there were too many for him to shake them from him. His coat was stripped. There was a gun in his holster.

"That gun! Take it from him. Give it to me!" said Don José.

The gun was handed to him and he tossed it indifferently to the floor.

They overpowered Nevinson, threw him on the table, face down, held his arms, his feet.

"Kill me! Kill me!" he cried, trying to lift his head.

"Oh ho ho! He begs!" shouted Don Gil triumphantly.

"I will talk," said Don José coldly, and Don Gil became silent.

Don José folded his arms and remained behind Nevinson, out of his sight. Don José was the only person of any calmness in the room. Hales was motionless, but not calm. The *vaqueros* were greatly excited. Many of them were from the de Sola rancho, had been born there of fathers who were born there.

"No," said Don José, "we do not keel you. My brother, Don Esteban, he begged, 'Keel me! Keel me, señors!' when you held an' wheeped heem! You had no mercy. You paid gold to other men to hunt an' keel heem, an' took his head to show in a tent an' men paid to look at his head. You Americanos beat Spaniards from the gol' camps, keel them, drive them away. You have no mercy. Give me the iron!"

Hales made a movement, but checked himself as Don José looked at the tip of steel, now grown dark, still hot but not red.

"Put it to the fire again. It must burn!"

The iron was taken into the kitchen, shoved into the coals.

"José," said Hales, speaking Spanish which he spoke as well as English, "do not—do not do this thing!"

"It is my oath, señor. While he lives it must be done!"

"You can't forgive him. That's impossible—but don't—not this—if you will, the whip, but in God's name, José, not this!"

"The head of my brother, Don Esteban—till the floods came, señor, was shown to gringos in a tent at Sacramento. They paid a dollar to look!"

"José! No—I swear—" Hales' voice choked.

Pasquito brought the iron, now hot, glowing red.

Don José took the iron, saying:

"The shirt. Tear it more. Off his back!"

Don Gil clawed at the shirt, and more fully exposed the muscles that twitched convulsively against the expected touch of iron.

Don José reached forward, and Hales reached out and caught the arm of Don José in his left hand. There was a flashing movement at Hales' hip and a gun's muzzle touched the side of Don José.

"You! This to me! Have you become his friend!"

"José, this shall not be—not while I live! He is no friend of mine! Less now than ever since I must do this for him! If you kill him in any way but murder—all right! But to torture—here—before me—any time—José, no! Don't, don't! José, before God I swear you are my friend, and this man I hate! I hate the people who have abused you—your friends—country, but this thing, no! I could never again look an American in the face! And here José, I swear before God, you will have to kill me before you put that iron on him!"

José spoke furiously, but in a low astonished tone—

"He has become your friend!"

He said that, believing that, because he was unable in any other way to understand.

"No!"

"You lie!"

And so they stood, looking into each other's eyes. Neither could move—there could be no movement without death. If any one caught at Hales, or shot him, the hammer of his gun would fall, and its muzzle was against the side of Don José.

José tossed the iron from his upheld hand. It fell with a shivering rattle on the tiles.

"Don Gil," said José, looking straight into Hales' eyes, "take up the iron and lay the de Sola brand upon that man!"

"I have sworn, José! And I will shoot!"

"I too have sworn, señor. And when you shoot me, you die, then he will wear the brand."

"José, no! In God's name, don't make me do it! The two of us—because of such a thing as he is. No, José!"

"While he lives it must be done. If I die, Don Gil has sworn!"

Not a sound was in the room. Many guns were aimed at Hales. Of all the men there, only the one forcibly held, face down, did not understand or know of what these men talked.

Don Gil, with his eyes on Hales, stooped and reached for the iron, now again turned dark, but still hot enough to make the mark; and with the iron in his hand he paused and cursed Hales for a gringo, like other gringos!

THEN abruptly there were shots, and shouts, the plunging stamp of horses; and in a moment Ferdinand leaped through the door as if thrown, crying—

"Gringo soldiers—they come! They left their horses and sneak up! Fly! Fly! The house is taken—"

He continued to shout as men, thrilled by panic, leaped for the doors. Don Gil threw away the iron, springing for the door and out, with gun drawn. Ferdinand, shouting and leaping about, knocked out candles. At the first cry of alarm, Hales had jumped back, releasing Don José's arm. Men fled.

José, with but one thought since he and his men must flee from soldiers, cried, "Bring him with us!" at those who still held Nevinson; then José turned toward the door.

All but one candle, high on a shelf was out, and Ferdinand would have leaped for that, but paused to bawl at the men who were dragging Nevinson:

"The gringos are soldiers—" he pushed at them,— "run for your lives! I will bring him."

Ferdinand, powerful as any three of them, seized Nevinson, shook loose the men who held him, crying:

"Out to your horses! I will bring him!"

They fled from the dim room into darkness. Men were shouting. Horses trampled and galloped. There were scattered shots, for the *vaqueros* excitedly shot at nothing.

Hales stood at the doorway, peering out.

Ferdinand, seeing all the *vaqueros* were out of the room, turned Nevinson free, shouting:

"Queek! Your gun! Bar up the doors! They will come back! There are no gringos! Pedro I made shoot an' we shout an' some horses I turn loose!"

"What's that?" said Hales, turning at the doorway, looking at Ferdinand.

Ferdinand snatched up the revolver from where Don José had thrown it, thrust it at Col. Nevinson, answering:

"It was a treeck! They will come back! Queek, we mus' bar up the door. Oh what a night!"

"There are many doors—and nothing to bar them with," said Hales. "Get *him* out before they come back."

Nevinson for a moment stood in a kind of angry daze, confused, unable to understand what had happened, or was happening. He heard men yelling at a distance, and Ferdinand's voice near; but he did not know what it was all about.

Elvira, wretchedly happy, rushed toward him.

Then suddenly Nevinson, with only one thought in his mind, leveled the gun at Hales:

"Now you greaser! Draw and—"

Ferdinand leaped with an oath, struck down his arm, held it, shouted:

"You ten fools, you! He save you! He—"

Elvira with her hands in a flutter of groping, caught at him, at his arms, his shoulders, his cheeks, and cried in frantic babbling of what Hales had said and done, saying unintelligibly that Hales was his friend.

Hales, from near the doorway, frowned at him in a sort of dull astonishment, forgetting that this man who understood no word of Spanish had been held face down over the table, unable to see, unable to understand what he had heard.

Ilona and Kredra had entered the room, and stood mystified. The *vaqueros* had gone, but these people now talked and acted as if mad.

Nevinson stared fixedly at Hales as he listened in incredulous confusion to what Ferdinand and Elvira were saying to him in broken phrases with a mingling of excited voices.

Then Ferdinand broke off to shout at Kredra:

"Away! Out of the room! Queek! Be gone! They will come back—it was a treeck—if they find you and the Dona Ilona—go!"

Nevinson drew a forearm across his face, saying—

"It can't be—I—I hear—but I don't—I hear what you say, but I don't—"

He looked slowly about, with a kind of confused inquiry toward Kredra, toward Ilona.

Then Elvira, hardly realising what she did, tearful, hysterical, ran at Hales, praising him, reaching out to him; but Hales, knowing it was she who had brought the de Sola men, and delivered Nevinson into their hands, drew back his arm, drawing away from her. The gesture was as if he meant to strike, and Nevinson shot.

Hales, hard hit, made a spinning stagger; but with muscles, gun-trained, drew and shot quick as a wolf snaps at one who strikes. And he did not miss. Nevinson lurched sidewise as if jerked, and with out-flung groping, fell.

THE savage face of Don Gil appeared in the doorway; beside him, Don José; behind them, other men; and still others, with a noiseless suddenness, came through the kitchen. They pressed within the big room, lighted by a single candle.

"Where is that —— Ferdinand," said Don Gil, "an' that Hales, an' the gringo colonel-man. It is more than a back brand now!"

Ferdinand stepped out, drew himself up, smote his breast.

"Here is Ferdinand, señor! There—" he pointed to Hales, gun in hand, sagging against the wall, badly hurt but ready to go into another fight—"is Señor Hales, an' there—" Ferdinand turned and pointed to the floor—"is the Col. Nevinson—dead!"

"Dead!" cried Don Gil, and began many oaths.

But Don José stopped him with a word and came to Hales—

"You have done this, señor?"

"Yes."

"I do not understand you, or why, Señor Hales! You are not his friend, señor!"

"No."

Don José regarded Hales with an unangered mystification, then glanced toward where Don Gil stooped—

"I swore that while he lived, it should be done—and he is dead. Dead, Don Gil?"

"Dead!" Don Gil growled, glowering about with menace.

Don José again looked at Hales with a kind of cool wonder, asking—

"You are hurt, señor? You say not much. But Americanos are mad, madmen! I do not understand you, my friend—my friend now again. It was not for that Nevinson you put your gun to my side and would have shot? Then why, *why* did you do that thing?"

Hales shook his head slowly, wearily, not answering.

"Mad! Madmen, all Americanos! All in California, madmen! But tonight I ride to leave California forever, señor. And my wife, the Dona Lucita—ah, Señor Hales, I cannot forget!"

He turned, speaking to his men, sharply:

"To your horses! Our work here is done!"

"But this Ferdinand!" cried Don Gil.

Then up spoke Ferdinand quickly:

"Ah Don Gil, Ferdinand is a wicked man! Leave him to God and God will punish him for that trick that saved Señor Hales and Don José from being two dead men!"

"Out! To your horses! We ride!" said Don José, and his men with a stumbling rush went through the doorway.

XXXI

SOME two weeks later Ferdinand and Kredra sat together in the Spring sunshine, on a bench near an open window.

Through the window came the tones of a man and a woman's voice, and quiet laughter.

"Doctor-men they are fools," said Ferdinand after listening for a moment. "Two of them they ride all the way out here to tell us he will die. Bah! The Leetle One, she knows more than doctor-men. You, Wise Woman, will Señor Hales marry our Dona?"

"Yes," said Kredra, quietly.

"But he does not know it yet, eh?"

"Not yet, Ferdinand."

"And the good Dona Elvira— Oh I am sorry for her. The doctor-man that came today he says one beautiful eye it is out forever—like a candle when I say *pouf!* And the face—Oh that wicked woman out of France to throw the acid stuff! Kredra, Wise One, why are women so wicked?"

"Shh-hh-h," said Kredra, lifting a silencing hand, listening.

Ferdinand listened, and could hear nothing. There was now no laughter, not even voices.

"What? What is it?" he whispered.

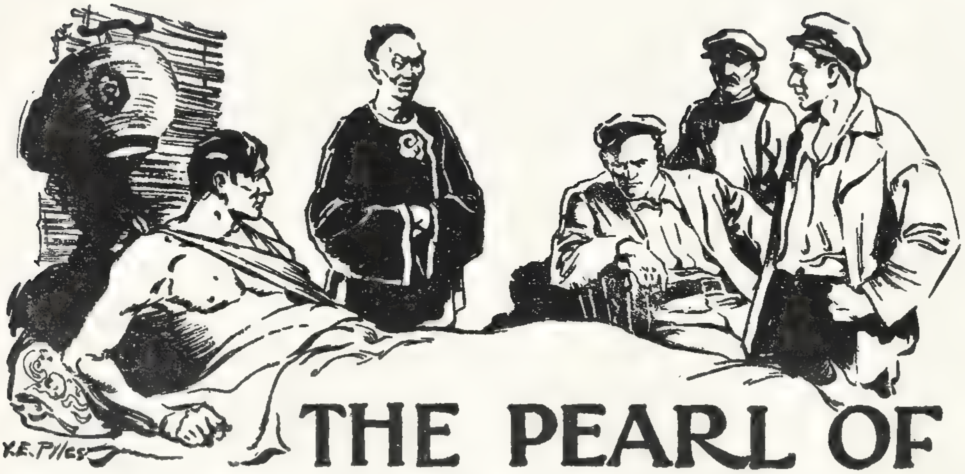
"Shh-hh-h, you will hear."

Ferdinand tilted his head, listening; he heard. It was the sharp sound of lips parting from lips they have pressed tightly.

"A-ho! *Now* he knows, eh! It has come! A-ho!" He raised the fiddle, tucking it under his chin, and lifted the bow, but paused. "And there will be many children, and I will tell them what a great fine good man was Ferdinand when their birth-land, this California, was a wild gold country. But us good men, we make it a fine place for little children to come and be born!"

Then the bow fell and danced upon the strings, and Ferdinand's voice rose in song.

THE END



THE PEARL OF EVIL DESIRE

by Frederick J. Jackson

Author of "Cassidy Troubles Trouble," "Loose Loot," etc.

ANY South Sea port is a hotbed of gossip, and Fara-Kea was no exception. Talk flew fast when two Kanakas sailed into the lagoon, towing behind their outrigger canoe a similar craft in which lay the sun-blackened, wasted form of Malthus Wain. Wain's last visit had been in his own schooner. He had been independent and almost insulting. The only man he had accepted as an equal had been Morovitch. the Russian trader.

And now Morovitch took Wain in and did his best to dress the old wound in the upper part of Wain's left arm—a wound which had refused to heal despite frequent bathing with ocean water. Wain refused to talk. The two native fishermen knew only that they had picked up Wain in the canoe some ten miles from the island. Whence had he come? What had happened to his schooner? How had he been wounded?

"It's none of their —— business!" said Wain, smiling wearily as though in apology to his host.

The phlegmatic Morovitch appeared to lack curiosity. He mixed a pair of tepid drinks with limes and gin. He prepared food and offered a hammock in the shade of a mango tree. Wain slept.

"It's none of your —— business," repeated Morovitch to the questions asked him by his neighbors. He dropped into an adjoining hammock. Not in the slightest did he consider it strange that Malthus Wain, the pearl buyer, now apparently destitute, had been spewed up on Fara-Kea.

Late that afternoon Captain Sloan's schooner dropped anchor behind the reef. Throughout Polynesia this mariner was known behind his back as "Slick" Sloan. He was a falcon of the seas, his reputation null and void. In place of reputation he carried an aura of evil. When he was near, men figuratively looked over their shoulders. His dark, oily face was always clean-shaven. Otherwise he appeared frowsy, his shore-going suit of buff linen invariably being wrinkled and soiled, his hands dirty, his nails black. His keen, sardonic eyes at times held a far-away light, as if he gazed beyond the rim of the sea. But he looked alert, cunning; his long nose gave him the knowing air of a fox.

He had no friends. He wanted none. To his Kanaka crew he was domineering, harsh and savagely cruel. He kept them aboard by holding back part of their wages, and by threatening to hunt down and kill any man who deserted before his stipulated term of service had expired. They believed the threat. To them he was an evil god who held them in his power. One of them had witnessed Sloan's brutal and treacherous murder of his partner following a quarrel over money. "Died at sea," had been Sloan's entry in the log-book, and he had backed this by a plausible tale. The authorities may have had their suspicions, but could prove nothing. The docile native crew had been cowed into silence.

Ostensibly Captain Sloan was a trader. He did a little trading as a blind. In reality he was a blackbirder—a supplier of plantation laborers, and not too choice in his methods of getting them. Drugged liquor, false promises, outright kidnapping with the aid of a blackjack were all in the day's work to him. He could never recruit twice from the same island, or at least from the same village. And there were vague hints and rumors anent other suspected villanies.

Such was the man who came ashore and called on Morovitch. Malthus Wain, refreshed by food and sleep, was in the store. He was still weak, almost tottering on his feet. Diffidently he returned Sloan's effusive greeting. Sloan stared, his eyes flickered with curiosity at Wain's appearance. But he asked no questions.

"My main tank sprung a leak," he said to Morovitch. "I want four casks of water sent out. How soon?"

"Right away—if you'll take them off the beach in your own boat; mine's being painted."

Morovitch shouted an order through the rear door. Sloan walked away to the saloon near at hand.

Malthus Wain watched him until he disappeared. Then he produced a very soiled handkerchief and untied a knot in one corner, revealing two medium lavender-gray pearls.

"These are all I got out of the wreck of things," he stated. "They aren't half bad, and I might dicker with you on them."

The trader examined the gems and named a sum.

"Quite fair," said Wain. "I want some clothes, a pair of shoes—and a revolver."

"White ducks, canvas shoes—yes," answered Morovitch. "But a gun—? I have only an old one to spare. It's liable to be a trifle rusty—"

"Never mind that. I'll oil it up."

And then Captain Sloan returned. Morovitch saw him outside the door and hastily removed the pearls from sight. Sloan stood around and watched the purchasing. He saw Wain receive the balance of the pearl money in cash. Sixteen pounds and a few shillings was the sum he heard counted out.

"Where are you bound?" questioned Wain.

"Suva."

"I'd like to get a passage there."

"I'm not in the passenger business," was the short reply. "But—I'll take you to Suva—for sixteen pounds."

The price was outrageous. Four pounds would have been more than enough. As a matter of fact, almost any skipper would have taken a stranded man to civilization without demanding payment. But not Sloan.

They went aboard Sloan's schooner. Malthus Wain crawled into a spare cabin berth, exhausted to the point of numbness by the privations he had undergone. He felt feverish, giddy. He did his best to think, and finally asked Sloan for a tin of fine cut tobacco. Sloan charged him a shilling for it, and grudgingly cut open the harmetically sealed tin. The sick man stuffed some of the tobacco into one cheek. It almost nauseated him, but it was part of the strategem suggested by his feverish brain. He did not trust Sloan.

Later Sloan went on deck. The boat had returned from the beach with the casks of water. Malthus Wain arose on one elbow, clawed half of the tobacco from the tin and hid it beneath the straw-filled mattress. Loosening two buttons of his shirt, he brought out a small cloth bag that had been suspended around his neck by a cord. He pulled the cord up over his head, emptied the rest of the tobacco from the tin and slipped into the receptacle the cloth bag. The bag contained something hard and smooth, the size of an average hazelnut. Hastily he stuffed tobacco back into the tin to hide the bag. He spat out the distasteful quid, and dropped into feverish slumber.

THE schooner sailed from Fara-Kea. Ashore, Morovitch sat looking at two lavender-gray pearls—and wondering. On the schooner's after-deck strode Captain Sloan, who also wondered. Both men knew Malthus Wain's reputation and uncanny ability for picking up wonderful pearls.

Morovitch hoped that Wain had more concealed on his person. He wished good luck to Wain. Captain Sloan was seized with the idea that Wain might not be as destitute as he appeared. And with Sloan; an idea meant action. But he was a fox; he played safe. The next morning Wain was a sick man, unable to rise from the bunk. The unhealed bullet wound in his arm bothered him, having passed from a neutral state to a malignant one. Sloan offered to doctor him, and Sloan's medicine consisted of one heavy dose from the bottle with which he doped the liquor when kidnapping the healthy males from a native village. With Wain in a state of coma, Sloan searched his person and the bunk, throwing to one side the partially filled tobacco tin. He found nothing worth while disgustedly replacing the few coins in his victim's pocket and the revolver beneath the pillow.

The schooner arrived at Suva. Malthus Wain felt the quiver in the vessel's timbers and heard the rattle and clank as the anchor chain roared through the hawse.

"Send for Quan Wing," was Wain's request. "He's a white chink. He'll take care of me."

Quan Wing was a shop-keeper in Suva. He was a buyer of pearls, of shark fins, of beche de mer, also an importer of Chinese labor for plantations. Malthus Wain had once befriended him, therefore Wain, a very sick man, was now taken care of to the best of Quan's ability. To gain the friendship of a Chinese means to gain a friend in need. It was characteristic of Wain that he refused to go to the hospital or to let the authorities handle his affairs in any manner.

Later that day Wain lay in the stifling back room of Quan Wing's store. Outside, the heat devils danced in the filthy street and along the beach. A shimmering haze lay on the harbor and over the blue of the tropical ocean. The wind had died; no coolness came from the sea to alleviate the maddening heat that was intensified by radiating through the corrugated iron roof. Quan Wing had spread a damp sheet to cool Wain's naked form. Wain's face was beaded with perspiration. The drops of sweat would swell to a certain size and then trickle down upon a gold-embroidered silk pillow. Quan Wing's best was at Wain's service.

There were five men in the room—Malthus Wain and Quan Wing, Captain Mathews, Slick Sloan and Buck Janson. Mathews ostensibly was a trader. His real vocation was smuggling. He was a cousin to Wain's wife, and in desperation Wain had sent for him. But that was before Wain had learned from Quan Wing that Buck Janson had arrived the day before.

Janson was a legitimate trader. But he too had his little quirk. When trading grew too tame, he would blithely stage a raid on some closed pearl lagoon. Outside of that, he was known to be painfully honest.

He was young, laughing-eyed, cool under all circumstances—and a wolf of a fighter with fists, guns or any weapon that lay handy when hostilities broke loose. Quan Wing approved of him, which was very much of a recommendation, for Quan kept mental books upon everybody who came to the Fijis.

Of Captain Sloan Quan did not approve. Through curiosity Sloan had wandered into the back room. He had stayed largely because of Quan's polite hints to go. Then had arrived Captain Mathews, followed shortly by Buck Janson. Sloan sensed that something unusual was about to occur. Once, behind Quan's bland expression, Sloan thought he detected a murderous look. It amused Sloan. And Quan Wing was filled with misgivings, for to him Slick Sloan was a bird of evil omen.

Malthus Wain's arms lay on top of the damp sheet. His upper left arm and shoulder, beneath the bandages, were swollen to a size larger than his thigh. His right hand was clenched on something the size of a hazelnut. His too-bright eyes watched the four men in the room, but most of all he watched Buck Janson. Janson's gaze was centered pityingly on Wain's face, but the eyes of the others stared in fascination at Wain's thin, nervous right hand.

Slowly the hand unclenched, to reveal fully for the first time the huge oval of glistening lavender-pink.

Quan Wing's glance fluttered to Captain Sloan, then back to the gem. He drew in his breath with a hiss.

"It is indeed a puhl of gleat plice," he said slowly, holding his breath. "It can be none but the fabulous Puhl of Evil Desiah. No luck but bad can follow a bit of heaven-dawn like that."

He exhaled with another hiss.

"Of great price, indeed," said Captain Mathews. Nervously he moistened his lips as he stared long at Slick Sloan. Then he blurted out, "It's worth a fortune—whatever you have the nerve to ask—in the right market."

The gaze of the man beneath the damp sheet alternated between the two speakers. Then it centered, fascinated, horrified, as though reading his thoughts, upon the twitching face of Captain Sloan. Sloan was cursing inwardly.

"To think," he moaned to himself, "that Wain carried that pearl from Fara-Kea on my schooner—and I didn't find it."

"You didn't think to look in the most obvious place—the tobacco tin," remarked Wain.

Sloan momentarily was unnerved. It was uncanny—this reading of his thoughts by a dying man. Buck Janson grinned at Sloan. Quan Wing smiled enigmatically.

Malthus Wain watched the expressions play on the faces of the others. He smiled faintly.

"No, Quan Wing, this is not the Pearl of Evil Desire," he said. "This pearl is a virgin one—it has no history. I came by it honestly—from the diver who brought it up at Thursday Island. He had brains enough to hide it until he saw me. The price I paid was all I had—my schooner, my stock of trade and all the cash I could raise. I planned to mortgage my home in Wellington and take my wife to Paris with me. In Paris I would have disposed of the pearl for sufficient cash for us to retire on. Some one overheard my bargaining with the diver. I had to fight——"

Malthis Wain stopped speaking. His eyes closed wearily. The four men watched breathlessly until Wain's eyelids lifted and he continued:

"This pearl must be placed in my wife's hands. She has little money—there's the four kiddies to be kept in school—" Wain's face had turned gray—a ghastly color there in the sunlight streaming through the iron bars of the open window. His right hand had clenched, concealing the pearl.

"Fifteen thousand pounds, at least," Wain muttered drowsily. "Buck Janson, *you* will see that my wife gets it. Take the pearl. I'm so—so—sleepy—"

His hand had moved to the edge of the couch. The fingers opened as though inviting Janson to remove the gem.

NOT a man stirred. The pearl dropped from the nerveless fingers and rolled, wobbling on the warped boards, across the room. Janson came to life. He took three steps and leaned down to pick up Mrs. Wain's inheritance. Mathews was right behind him. With a curse Mathews placed both hands back of Janson's hips and shoved viciously. Janson crashed headlong against a hardwood upright of the wall. He lay where he fell, stunned.

Captain Mathews scrambled after the pearl. Quan Wing had been standing with his arms clasped across his stomach, his hands concealed in the ample sleeves of his black silk robe. Quan's hands came out of his sleeves. In his right hand was a long knife. Equally swift was Captain Sloan in drawing a .45 automatic. With a short, brutal swing he brought the side of the barrel of the heavy weapon down on the Chinaman's black skull cap. Quan Wing collapsed like an empty gunny sack. Mathews clutched the pearl and from his position on hands and knees as he started to arise looked up over his shoulder at Captain Sloan. The pistol barrel struck him just above his left eye. It brought a spurt of blood from the broken skin. Mathews joined the other unconscious figures on the floor.

Sloan took the pearl, examined and gloated briefly, then dropped it into his pocket. Calculatingly he looked at the three men on the floor. Buck Janson stirred. Sloan leaped and slashed savagely at Janson's head with the pistol. Astride Janson's body he stood with the weapon poised—and finally decided it would not be necessary to strike again. He did not want to kill, for Janson had seen nothing, could be no witness against him.

Captain Mathews—that was different. Sloan vividly remembered the last apprehensive glance Mathews had cast up over his shoulder as he started to arise. Mathews must not be allowed to live. Sloan grinned evilly as he looked at Quan Wing and the long knife that lay near him. The Chinaman would be hard put to explain to the authorities when the knife was found between Mathew's ribs.

Meditatively Sloan fingered the pearl in his coat pocket. With a fortune literally within his grasp his thoughts coldly centered on how best to escape with it. A man with the least spark of humanity might have become unnerved at the scene in the room, might have become panic-stricken and attempted to flee the port. Sloan's schooner could not leave because of the lack of wind. And even if there had been an available breeze Sloan would not have taken that means of escape; it might serve to lay suspicion on him, and he was fully aware of the long reach of British law. His brain must put him clear.

Calculatingly his gaze wandered around the room. The windows were barred with heavy iron rods. The only entrance to the room was by the door, now closed. It could be secured on the inside by a small bolt. He tried the bolt; it slid home easily into a japanned-iron socket. He let the door stay locked. Into his mind had leaped, full-fledged, a scheme.

At the side of the couch he paused. Wain's eyes were open in an unwinking stare. The feverish luster had died. Wain's scant hold on life had departed simultaneously with the pearl's rolling from his hand. A moment's concentration. Sloan pushed his hand beneath the embroidered pillow and found the revolver that had belonged to Morovitch. With a firearm in each hand he stepped away and for a moment moved each hand up and down in front of him as though testing the potentialities of each weapon. His brain worked fast. His twisted smirk was murderous as he finally pocketed his own heavy automatic.

With Wain's revolver twice he struck the gory spot on Mathew's forehead, making certain that the barrel and cylinder became plentifully smeared with blood. Heavily in turn he then swung the gun upon the unconscious heads of Buck Janson and Quan Wing. Each blow left a bloody mark that Sloan was sure that even a stupid native constabulary officer could read. And in Sloan's estimation the British authorities themselves were not much more intelligent than the natives.

Sloan next threw back the sheet on the couch. Without even a shudder he seized the body of Malthus Wain and dragged it to a sprawling position on the floor. He lifted Wain's right arm and laid it across Quan Wing's back. Into the lifeless fingers of Wain he placed the blood-smeared revolver and for a time held them closed, after inserting Wain's forefinger through the trigger-guard. Briefly he examined Buck Janson and Quan Wing. They were breathing. Men are hard to kill. Sloan had wielded a heavier weapon than a pistol—a galvanized iron belaying pin—upon skulls with more force than he had used in smashing Janson and Quan Wing. All but one of his victims had recovered.

He eyed the long knife on the floor. He picked it up, and for the first time hesitated. A bullet or a bludgeon—yes. But a knife? Even the worst of men have their pet scruples. To Sloan, killing a man with a knife was outside the code. But Sloan's plan, as it had flashed into his mind, included several very ripe herrings that were to be dragged across the trail. Wain's gun was one of them. Quan Wing's knife was another. He grimaced, then stooped and viciously buried the blade almost full length beneath Mathew's left shoulder.

He straightened up and drew a full breath of the stifling air. He stiffened suddenly then ran to crouch against the wall, out of range of vision from the nearest window. A noise outside had alarmed him, and for the first time he became a bit unnerved with the fear of interruption. He listened to the scuff-scuff of sandals as an elderly Chinaman, bearing two laden baskets at either end of a pole across one shoulder, passed by. A little later, Sloan stealthily peered in turn from each of the windows. The Chinaman scuffled along one hundred yards away. Twice that distance in the other direction a native policeman in blue tunic and white *sulu* leaned back in the shade of a palm. He was half asleep. A dog in the shade of a palm hut was the only other living thing in sight. In the fearsome heat of that calm day no one who could avoid it stirred abroad.

Sloan grinned at his momentary fear. Calmly he walked over and broke two feet of black silk thread from a spool that lay on a table. He stepped to the doorway, looped the thread around the knob of the bolt and pulled it back and forth. It worked easily. With his left hand holding both ends of the thread, the bight still around the knob, he opened the door, passed through and closed it from the other side. The thread led back through the jamb to the bolt. Cautiously, experimentally, he pulled on the strands. The bolt slid home and he was locked out of the room. Releasing one end, he pulled clear the silk thread. Then in an excess of caution he struck a match and burned the bit of silk.

In haste he slipped off one of his low canvas shoes, dropped the pearl into its toe and replaced the footgear. It was very uncomfortable, but it was also the safest hiding place of which he could think. He wanted the gem with him when he returned aboard his schooner. For some reason he disposed of his automatic by thrusting it deeply between some bolts of silk on a counter. Then, limping slightly because of the awkward position into which the pearl forced his toes, he went out into the glare of the street.

A FEW minutes later he returned, accompanied by the assistant High Commissioner, a native sergeant and two native constabulary officers.

"They were quarreling when I left," explained Sloan. "Then the thought struck me that I had better return and try to stop the quarrel. I hadn't been out of the room a minute, but some one had bolted the door on the inside. I heard them fighting like mad dogs, so I thought I'd better summon the authorities."

"Quite right, my man," commended the official, knocking on the door to the rear room. There was no answer. He tried the knob. The door refused to open.

"Ah! Still bolted."

A moment's thought.

"Burst through?" was the order to the sergeant.

Three husky native shoulders simultaneously struck the door. The flimsy bolt gave way; the constables sprawled into the room. Sloan waited for the assistant commissioner to enter, then followed.

The four men still lay on the floor as Sloan had left them. The official turned slightly pale as he examined carefully the blood-smeared revolver in Wain's dead fingers and the knife hilt protruding from Mathew's back. He tried to look wise, but succeeded only in looking shocked. He said "ah!" profoundly several times, and finally sent for a government medical man. He questioned Sloan, but with no suspicion. back of his inquiries, for the bolted door had put Sloan in the clear. Sloan smiled crookedly as he limped away.

Buck Janson regained consciousness in the hospital.

"Where's the pearl?" was his first query, after he realized where he was. "It must have been Mathews who put me out."

"Captain Mathews is dead," was the attendant's reply. "So is Mr. Wain. The Chinaman is in the adjoining room"—pointing. "It is doubtful if he will recover."

"What happened to Quan?"

"Bashed on the head—very badly, indeed."

"Then it's Sloan who must have got the pearl," Janson blurted out.

"Impossible. It was Captain Sloan who notified the assistant commissioner that something was wrong at the Chinaman's. The rear door was locked—bolted on the inside. The brown bobbies burst it in. What about a pearl? The commissioner must learn of this."

"What about a pearl!" exclaimed Janson. "That's right, though; you wouldn't know of it. Gimme my clothes; I'm getting out of here."

"You had better not attempt it, sir. Your head—"

"It's *my* head!" snapped Buck. "Even though you've got it plastered up. Has Sloan's schooner sailed?"

"Not yet, sir. There's no breeze. And Captain Sloan, I am certain, has been requested to remain to testify at the enquiry."

"I've got to see the commissioner. Right now."

Buck swung his feet clear of the cot and sat up. He winced and grimaced.

"I guess I spoke out of turn when I claimed it was my head. I'm sorry right now that I own it. Are you sure it's still in one piece? It feels as though it's split."

"Fortunately," smiled the other, "your skull is very thick."

"Yes, and if Sloan gets away with that pearl I'll admit there's a lot of other thick skulls in Suva. Bring my clothes —and a big peg of Scotch along with them. A stiff drink will take away this sick, dizzy feeling."

Fully clothed, and still feeling a bit uncertain as to what it was all about, Janson made his way to the bedside of Quan Wing. The Chinaman was still unconscious. It was doubted that he had any chance of recovery, for his age was against him. Slowly Buck walked away.

A constable, who had been loafing near-by, confronted him.

"I'm sorry, sir, that you cannot leave the premises without an order from the assistant commissioner."

"Like —— I can't!" flared Buck. Then he reconsidered. "Tell you what—we'll compromise. I'm going to see the commissioner, so you come along with me." Buck started away.

The native officer, scratching his head, fell into step with him. He was doubtful, but Buck's manner carried authority, and the compromise seemed the easiest way out for the harassed Kanaka.

The assistant commissioner was lacing his tea with rum as Buck unceremoniously walked in. The official glared in turn at Buck and the embarrassed constable.

"What now?" he inquired testily.

"Right the first time," blithely answered Buck. "Am I or am I not under arrest—and why, if any? I can find my way about Suva without a fat nurse." He looked at the bottle. "Baccardi's my favorite. Exactly two fingers will do."

"Eh—er—" Mechanically, half-dazed at Buck's unheard of confidence and flippancy, the commissioner pressed a bell and ordered another cup. "These Americans—" he thought.

"That's better," grinned Janson. "It gives me confidence in you. Now let's get together on this thing."

The commissioner gasped, outraged, but helpless, as he watched Buck drop two lumps, squeeze half a lime, stir his tea and add the rum.

"There's something awful fishy in what's happened today," began Buck. "I was pretty much in the dark—" touching his bandaged head—"and you're the same way, if you don't know about the pearl."

Buck told how a Chinese boy had summoned him to Quan Wing's store. Also, everything that had happened up to the point where he had reached for the pearl as it rolled across the floor.

"Somebody, as I leaned down, played football," he concluded. "I got the center rush, with somebody's hands on my buttocks. There was a shower of stars, and then another shower. That's all I know—until I woke up in the hospital."

The commissioner poured more tea for himself as he leisurely digested the story.

"And you say that Captain Sloan was in the room when you reached for this pearl?"

"Positively!"

"That is impossible! He avers that four of you, including Mr. Wain, were quarreling when he departed."

"My ——, man—Wain *died!* The pearl rolled from his dead fingers. Sloan *was* there."

In a superior way, the commissioner smiled. In turn he related the way in which he had answered Sloan's summons.

"THE nerve of the —— murderer!" exploded Buck. "It appears to be my word against his."

"You have forgotten that the door was bolted on the inside," pointed out the commissioner. "Evidence in Captain Sloan's favor—irrefutable evidence, I might say. And you admit that you were bashed to a state of unconsciousness before anything of the bloody mess occurred. Quite a jolt on the bean, old chap, and you know it might have shifted your compass a point or two. One can be affected that way, you know, and really not at all be aware of it. Even the pearl of which you speak may be an hallucination of a jolted brain."

"Aw, rats!" groaned Buck. "Are you as stupid as that? Two men dead, and Quan Wing dying. Me with a cracked head. Do you think all this happened just to relieve the monotony of a hot day?"

The commissioner purpled. With an effort he cleared his throat and ordered the constable to search Quan Wing's back room for the pearl.

"Wait a minute," said Buck. "I want to be there when the search is made. That pearl would tempt anybody. But what's the use?" he finished. "It's a cinch that Sloan now has the pearl."

The commissioner had managed to gather together the remains of his ruffled dignity.

"Cinch?" he repeated. "I take it that in your blooming American slang the word is a synonym for certainty."

"I can't fool you at all," complimented Buck.

"Well, in your own word it's a cinch that you are wrong. You forget the door bolted on the inside."

"But I remember that Slick Sloan is mixed up in this deal—also that he was still in the room when I was knocked out. There's something fishy somewhere. What's Sloan's reputation with you?"

"Black," replied the commissioner. "Very black—also black-birdy."

"What's mine?"

"In your own word, fishy. According to a patrol boat commander, shell-fishy. Haw-haw!"

The commissioner was restored to good humor by his own jokes. Furthermore, to prove that Buck Janson was in the wrong, he agreed to accompany Buck and the constable in their search of Quan Wing's back room for the pearl.

A careful search revealed no pearl—as Buck had suspected. Drawing this blank served to put the commissioner in even a better humor. He ordered the constable to remain on guard over the store.

"Quan Wing's nephew, Quan Mock, will return soon from Levuka in his launch. He is the old man's partner and heir. Stay in charge until Quan Mock returns." This to the constable.

"And now, my man,"—turning to Buck—"you brought up the subject of this mythical pearl. You are so positive that it exists that I presume you will have no objection to a search of your person. A mere formality, I assure you."

"Did you search Captain Sloan?" demanded Buck.

"Certainly not. He is the chief witness for the crown."

"—— it! I tell you he must have the pearl."

"Ah!" The commissioner's right forefinger pointed skyward as he held the tip in front of one eye and looked wise. "Ah! You forget the bolted door."

Buck's temper snapped. A flood of words left no doubt in the commissioner's mind as to Buck's opinion of things in general and British colonial authorities in particular. Sincerity was the keynote of Buck's harangue and it made the insults the more poignant.

The commissioner felt apoplectic symptoms. He recovered and yearned strongly to make Buck answer man to man, but his official dignity came to the rescue. He contemplated the sweet thought of clapping Buck into jail for an indefinite period, but was deterred by the thought that he might be making an ass of himself if he did. So he compromised with his better feelings by allowing Buck to go aboard his schooner for the night. An armed constable went along to remain on guard, presumably to prevent Buck's escape. In reality the thrusting of a guard upon Buck was a sop to the commissioner's sadly dented dignity.

Buck resented the presence of the guard; it prevented carrying out his intention of seeking a far from gentle interview that night with Slick Sloan. Aboard the schooner the Chinese cook offered food to Buck and was rewarded by having his ancestors insulted. In a huff the cook retired to the galley, where he finally decided that the constable was the fly in Buck's ointment. Therefore when the constable applied for food he was offered his choice of a cleaver or a pot of boiling water, along with the assurance that the cook would take a deep joy in throwing either one or a deeper joy in letting go with both.

Darkness came, with no moon. Buck sulked in his cabin, while the constable prepared to spend an uncomfortable night on deck. For lack of inspiration, Buck morosely helped himself to a few fingers of "Cream of the Barley." Sourly he regarded the label on the bottle. A grin spread slowly on his face, a gleam lighted his eyes. The constable, watching hungrily through a forward porthole, saw this in the yellow light of the cabin lamp. He attributed it to the liquor—and moistened his lips enviously.

But it was a thought of the constable from a new angle that had brought the grin.

"Suppose," thought Buck, "that the fat officer falls asleep. I can sneak over and use a little rough work on Sloan. If anything happens to Sloan in case he puts up too much of a fight I'll have a lulu of an alibi, for, if I know Kanakas, this boy will swear he kept a vigilant guard all night long and that I didn't leave the schooner. The more he sleeps, the more he'll swear he didn't."

It was a good scheme, but depended entirely upon the constable's inability to resist slumber. And Buck had already planned to lower the guard's resistance. To this end he walked into the spare stateroom, pulled the squat medicine-chest from beneath the lower berth and ransacked its contents. He decided to try laudanum, and poured a judicious dose into a glass. Leaving this glass on the lid of the chest he returned to the cabin and poured himself another small drink.

A few minutes later he went up the companionway. Paying not the slightest heed to the constable he began slowly to pace the after deck. Finally he stopped to lean down with his elbows on the rail and watch the lighted portholes on Sloan's schooner, distant several hundred yards. Into his range of vision crept the sidelights of a launch approaching from seaward.

The constable, several feet away, likewise leaning with his elbows on the rail, turned and spoke—

"I'm sorry, sir, about—"

"You needn't be," interrupted Janson. "I'm sorry you were ordered to spend the night aboard. It's a rotten deal for you. How about a drink? It'll cheer up the evening."

"Well, sir, I'd cherish it, but the assistant commissioner is very—"

"Oh, hang the commissioner! What he doesn't know won't hurt him. Come along."

The constable gladly accompanied Buck to the cabin. Buck reached into the stateroom for the prepared glass, which he held clasped in his hand as he filled it with whisky. He poured another drink for himself and then carefully handed the drugged glass to the constable.

" 'Ere's ——, bloomin' 'ow!" said the constable, imitating a cockney shopkeeper in Suva.

" 'Ow!" agreed Buck.

They drank.

"You'll have a bad night on deck, constable," sympathized Buck. "A long night. You might as well have a little comfort."

He dragged forth a narrow mattress from the spare stateroom. "You can prop this against the poop-rail and lean back against it. Sit on half, lean back on the other half; then you won't be stiff or too tired in the morning. You can throw it down the companionway just before daylight—then the commissioner won't know, in case he objects to your being comfortable. I'm turning in, myself, for a night's sleep. It'll do my head good." Buck pointed to the bandage.

"Thank you kindly, sir; you are very considerate. And you are a gentleman for taking this attitude. My being on guard is the commissioner's doings; not mine, I assure you."

"Oh, that's all right." Buck stifled a grin.

The constable lugged the mattress up the companionway and made himself comfortable in a semi-reclining posture, per Buck's suggestion.

"A rather intelligent brown boy," mused Buck, "but the greater his intelligence, the stronger he'll make my alibi—to protect himself. And I'll sure back him up in case he is forced to lie to the commissioner. I hope I didn't give him too big a dose."

Buck turned out the cabin lamp, removed his shoes and let each clatter on the floor. His bunk creaked, as he knew it would, as he turned in. The noise would reassure the constable.

HALF an hour later he edged as silently as possible out of his bunk and in stockinged feet crept up the companionway. As he had hoped, the constable was sound asleep. The drug had worked. After returning to the cabin for his .38 automatic, Buck pulled the dingey under the stern rail and dropped down into it. Using one oar over the stern of the small craft, he sculled silently towards Sloan's schooner.

With no noise at all he edged the dingey alongside. The painter in his hand, he climbed aboard and made fast the rope to a belaying pin in the rail. He stopped to listen. There was no sound. If a native was keeping anchor-watch, he was probably asleep on the forecastle head. In addition to the riding-lantern the only visible light was through the small skylight on the poop-deck. Buck crept aft.

Carefully, crouching low, he made his way to the skylight and peered down. At an old-fashioned desk, screwed to the wall, sat Captain Sloan, evidently writing a letter. Buck smiled with satisfaction and hastened silently to the companionway. He was still in stockinged feet.

Slick Sloan looked back over his shoulder to face the muzzle of a .38 automatic that appeared to be no colder and grimmer than the man who held it.

"Just hold your position and don't make a noise," said Buck. "I'm after that pearl—*and I'm going to get it.*"

"What pearl?" questioned Sloan, innocently, softly. "And do you know what position you're placing yourself in—holding me up this way?"

"Sure I do," answered Buck, "and I've got a perfect alibi. You're the only witness against me, and I'd as soon kill you as step on a snake's head. You're well named as

Slick' Sloan. It was slick the way you put it over on the authorities ashore. But you haven't put it over on me! To me it's A-B-C. How long is a piece of string? The answer is that you've got the pearl! Also that you killed Mathews and perhaps Quan Wing, too. The bolted door fooled the authorities, but not me. I read a story last year, where a fellow bolted a door from the outside with a piece of thread. That's what you did! I know it, but can't prove it. The only way I can prove anything is by finding the pearl aboard your schooner."

"Go ahead and search," sneered Sloan.

He laughed to himself as he wriggled his toes against the gem. He had been afraid, even at that late hour, of a search by the authorities and had kept the pearl in what he considered the safest hiding place of all.

"That's just what I'm going to do," answered Buck, as he picked up several sheets of writing paper from the desk and wadded them into a ball. He had kept the muzzle of the automatic against Sloan's neck. The wads of paper were in his left hand. He slid his left forearm against Sloan's throat, from behind, and brushed the pistol muzzle against Sloan's lips.

"Better open your mouth—wide," advised Janson. "Otherwise I'll be forced to smash it open. If you want busted lips and broken teeth, just be a little contrary. This pistol barrel will smash your teeth like glass—and I'm feeling in the right humor to do it. I dare you to resist. Give me the slightest excuse, that's all!"

"You—"

Janson's left forearm tightened on Sloan's throat; the pistol muzzle clapped against his temple.

"Don't talk!" grated Buck.

Sloan's momentary struggle was purely instinctive. His right hand brushed to the floor the thin tumbler that had stood near the edge of the desk. The crash and tinkle of broken glass roused Buck to stern methods. Dispassionately, coldly, he struck Sloan on the head with the flat side of the pistol barrel, then eased the limp body to the cabin floor.

A moment of uncertainty, a short period of listening, a quick survey from the head of the companionway to make sure that there had been no alarm—and Buck was satisfied. Sloan's entire crew lived forward; he alone had living quarters aft. Unknown to Janson, when at anchor there was a deadline aboard the vessel, abaft of which members of the crew dared not trespass during certain hours. Normally, Buck was safer than he knew.

Buck pried open Sloan's mouth and stuffed it full of wadded paper. A towel from a rack served to complete the gag. A dirty sheet snatched from Sloan's bunk was wrapped around his legs from his ankles to his knees, and the ends securely knotted. Sloan's belt was pulled from the trouser loops and, twice wrapped, pinioned his arms above the elbows from behind. Sloan's pet, and only necktie was used to bind his wrists.

Again Buck peered and listened from the companionway, then started a methodical search of the cabin, beginning with the desk and finally turning out the contents of lockers to pry to their innermost corners. Half an hour later Buck confessed himself baffled, but still unwilling, however, to admit that he was wrong. Sloan, who had long since regained consciousness, glared at him with baleful, sneering eyes. Buck helped himself to one of Sloan's cigars. Puffing thoughtfully, he stared around the cabin. He met Sloan's glare and answered it by making a careful search of Sloan's person. Working down towards the shoes, he loosened the sheet below Sloan's knees.

Now Sloan's native crew had been fed up on his brutality. Long since had they decided to take French leave—to desert at the first opportunity. At the smaller islands they had not dared, fearful of Sloan's threat to hunt them down. But Viti Levu was an island nearly one hundred miles in length and almost as wide. Its size gave them courage, for in the mountain fastnesses would be innumerable safe hiding places. They possessed an exaggerated idea of Sloan's evil powers and cunning, but Nuufi, the big Kanaka who ranked as first mate, pointed out that the island was large and that Sloan was but one man.

There was, however, a division of opinion. Half the crew favored slipping overboard and chancing the sharks as they swam ashore. Nuufi and two other boys stood out for stealing the whaleboat and making their way to some isolated spot where they would "lay low" until the schooner had left the Fijis. A whaleboat was worth money; it would make up for the wages Sloan had held back on them. The catch in this proposition was that the whaleboat was padlocked to the schooner at the end of a strong iron chain, and that Sloan slept lightly with a pistol within easy reach. The whispered conference in the forecastle, attended by all hands, was what had enabled Buck Janson to slip aboard without being observed.

THE final decision was in favor of the whaleboat, Nuufi and the other two brave spirits volunteering to steal aft and take care of Sloan. They would bind the captain and lock him in the cabin. It was Nuufi, better acquainted with the ways of the white man than the other more primitive lads, who sternly vetoed the pleasing suggestion that they kill Sloan while they were about it. Nuufi had once witnessed a hanging.

In their bare feet the three Kanakas stole aft and entered the cabin. They sneaked silently across the linoleum of the dining saloon and paused, gaping, at the door of Sloan's cabin. They saw Sloan gagged and helpless, with a strange man, an intruder, working to loosen the sheet that bound Sloan's legs below the knees.

The situation was made-to-order for them, but their infantile minds were disconcerted. The habit of loyalty arose supreme before any of them were given time to think. Nuufi led the way. Simultaneously they leaped upon Janson and by sheer weight bore him down and held him helpless on the floor. Nuufi hastened to release Sloan's arms—and a moment later, his brain working belatedly, was sorry, for Sloan immediately seized the automatic pistol that Janson had laid upon the transom seat. Nuufi almost courted death by thinking of leaping upon his master, but was restrained by sight of the blued weapon that seemed entirely fitting when held threateningly by Sloan. Nuufi's jaw dropped in bewilderment; he gasped, then quickly decided to make a virtue out of the lost opportunity.

"Him deadline no be tonight?"

"No, not tonight. Good boy, Nuufi!" Sloan grinned crookedly. "Tie him up," pointing to Janson, whose struggles had been overcome by the two powerful natives. "And here—" pulling the soiled casing from a pillow—"go down in hold and fill half full of sand from ballast. Savvy? Half full."

Nuufi understood the implicit instructions. He did not guess Sloan's intention of fastening the weight to Janson's body and dropping it overboard. If he had, it would have made no difference.

"And, Nuufi, you find boat alongside—you cast adrift. Savvy?"

The Kanaka mate nodded. Pillow-slip in hand, he left the cabin and headed across the dining saloon for the companionway. A hand with the strength of steel grabbed his throat. Two sinewy hands laid themselves upon each of his arms; he was powerless.

Sloan was leaning over, supervising the job of binding Janson. A form clad in blue denim shot through the doorway from the saloon. A belaying pin smashed against the back of the hand holding the automatic. The gun dropped from the numb fingers as Sloan turned to grapple with the newcomer. The struggle was over in a few seconds, for in that space of time eleven Chinese had rushed into the cabin, crowding it to the limit, and forcing the two Kanakas back against the wall.

Buck looked up at them as he was released—a few Chinamen in the garments of laborers, some in black silk, and a young man in the latest cut of English garments. The latter, in perfect schoolboy English, questioned Buck—

"Who are you?"

"I'm Buck Janson."

"Oh," with a smile, "I'm Quan Mock, Quan Wing's nephew. My venerable relative spoke before he died—he spoke to me. That's why I am here. It must be your dingey alongside, and you had better return to your schooner and forget that you have been here tonight. You may trust me to handle the situation, according to the instructions given me by the honorable Quan Wing. He was a very wise old gentleman."

"I'm licked," announced Buck, "and perfectly willing to forget that I was here. I'll leave the rest to you."

"You are a wise man."

Young Quan Mock smiled, and turned as Nuufi in the grasp of three Chinese was led into the cabin.

Nuufi coughed and spluttered with a flood of words. He was scared, and showed it; his dark-brown face in the light of the cabin lamp was bistre in color. His eyes were almost round instead of oval, exposing a startling expanse of white.

Quan Mock listened, and smiled again. He gave instructions for the padlock on the whaleboat to be broken. The Kanaka crew could go where they pleased. With Oriental guile, Quan Mock had instantly decided to let the Kanakas go their way—and bear the blame for whatever happened to Sloan's schooner.

Buck Janson lowered himself over the rail into the dingey. A Chinaman cast loose the painter. Buck sculled back to his own schooner. He would have liked to remain and see things through with Quan Mock, but the latter's firm orders had been for Buck to go. Buck went—with a feeling of helplessness.

Aboard his schooner he found the constable still asleep. Tentatively he grasped the Kanaka's shoulder and gave a vigorous shake. To his surprize, the officer awoke. The dose of laudanum must have been small or the man's resistance to it large.

"I heard noises and came on deck," said Buck. "I found you asleep, so I woke you up."

The constable blinked stupidly.

"The drink must have affected me strongly on an empty stomach, sir," he apologized.

"Come below and have another drink to waken you up," offered Buck.

The officer accepted, and a minute later they were back on deck.

"Listen," said Buck.

Across the calm water came the sound of metal banging against metal—four or five repeated blows. Buck decided that it was the padlock being broken with a hammer; that the Chinese had not found the padlock key. Then a hollow thump or two, followed shortly by the unmistakable sound of oars against thole pins.

"Somebody's leaving the schooner," voiced the officer.

"I guess you're right," grinned Buck.

"Deuced queer—they're going out to sea," said the other, as the sound grew fainter.

Buck had reached into the binnacle for a pair of night binoculars. He saw the receding swirls and splashes of phosphorus from the oars, also a boiling faint streak of light in the water as another craft left Sloan's schooner. Concentration through the powerful glasses brought the outline of this craft dimly into view. He knew it to be the naphtha-burning steam launch belonging to Quan Mock. He imagined that he heard the faint hiss of steam. The constable saw and heard nothing.

A faint glare lighted up the after end of Sloan's schooner. Flames suddenly leaped from the cabin companionway and spread over the deck with such startling rapidity that it was evident even to the unimaginative constable that kerosene or petrol had been spilled in lavish quantities.

"Why, that ship must be on fire!"

The Kanaka's voice held a note of amazement and unbelief that caused Buck to grin. He also paid a mental compliment to the school in Suva, for even under stress the native's English accent was perfect.

"How did you guess it?" asked Buck.

The officer looked pained. He turned shoreward and bawled out an alarm. This was useless, for in Suva Harbor there was no fire-fighting craft. The gunboat, which might have served as such, was absent on patrol.

SUN-BAKED timbers and paint, the pitch in the deck seams encouraged the fire. The flames roared as they leaped skyward up the tarred rigging—a gigantic torch illuminating a wide expanse of harbor and creating weird, mysterious shadows on the adjacent island. Shore boats circled around, crowded with spectators. The whole town had awakened, for a burning schooner was a real event in the monotony of life in Suva.

By morning the vessel had burned to the water's edge, but still remained afloat, a blackened hulk, swinging to the anchor chain in a resentful way that reminded Buck of a body in the gallows. The fate of Slick Sloan concerned Buck not at all. His only worry was whether or not Quan Mock had found the pearl, for Buck's thoughts persisted in drawing a sorry picture of Mrs. Wain and the four younger Wains starving in New Zealand.

Another constable came aboard to relieve the man who had spent the night on the schooner. At noon Buck went ashore. The relief constable started to accompany him. Buck in the dingey, looked up at the officer on the rail.

"Your orders are to stay aboard!" said Buck, convincingly. With that, he pushed away from the schooner, leaving the man in a doubtful state of mind. Buck possessed the gift of speaking with authority.

Unmolested, he found Quan Mock. There were a number of other people in the shop.

"Captain Janson, I am glad your schooner is going to sail—you may trust me." The young Chinaman smiled and dropped an eyelid.

Buck did not know what to make of this. He turned away, and for lack of anything better strolled around to harass the assistant commissioner.

"How is this, my man?" questioned the official; "you are supposed to be under surveillance."

"Oh, I ordered the constable to remain on the schooner. He's on duty there," grinned Buck.

"But—" helplessly.

"But, nothing!" interjected Buck. "Unless you're going to be friendly about this, my next call will be on the American consul. I don't like your attitude in this matter. I'm an innocent, aggrieved party. This strip of plaster on my head is a symbol of purity and innocence. If you can't take that viewpoint I'll slip the gag off the eagle and let it scream. I'm on my way to the consul." Buck was enjoying himself thoroughly.

The assistant commissioner gulped. He could meet arrogance with sternness, as a rule, but the obvious glint of humor in Buck's eyes was too much for him. The official's pet fear was of making himself ridiculous. He cleared his throat.

"The constable will be recalled immediately," was the apology. "You were under surveillance merely as a material witness. Your presence is demanded at the inquiry which takes place at two o'clock. Burial services will be at four—when Mr. Wain, Captain Mathews and the charred bones of Captain Sloan, which we found in his cabin will be laid to rest. Quan Wing will be taken care of by his nephew in the peculiar way of their race. That is all, my man—until the inquiry."

Buck gazed hintingly at the bottle of rum, but the official turned away. Buck regretfully took his departure.

TWO days later Buck's schooner cleared the port. With topsail set, it laid a course through Kanduva Passage. "For Pacific Islands," read the ship's papers. Kanduva Island finally lay plainly visible over the port bow as Buck Janson morosely strode the deck and wondered about Quan Mock and the pearl. Buck had failed to gain another and more satisfactory interview with the young Chinaman.

Far astern, above the horizon, appeared a speck of white. An hour later Quan Mock's steam-launch had overhauled the schooner. It shot by, less than a dozen feet from the schooner's lee rail. Young Quan Mock hurled a package onto the main deck of the larger craft. Buck unwrapped it, after waving a farewell to the launch, which had sheered around and headed back toward Suva.

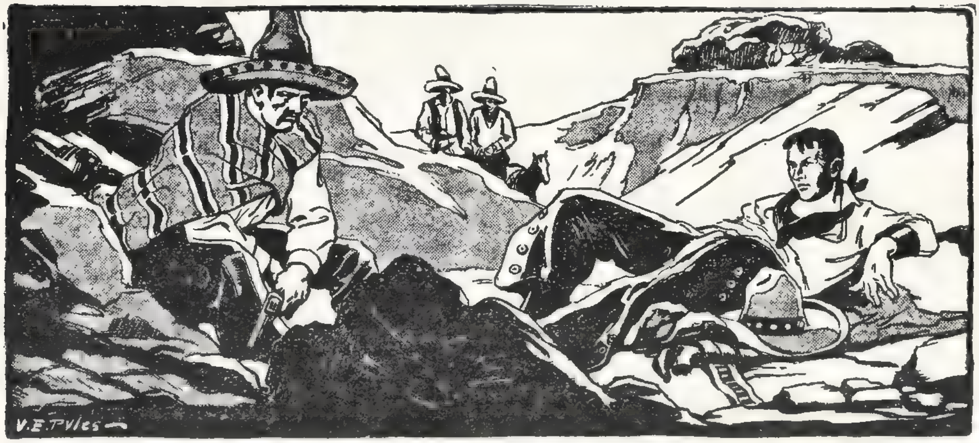
There was a brief note written in a round schoolboy hand and signed by Quan Mock:

> I have complied with the orders of my honorable relative.

In the package were several large corks, to insure its keeping afloat to be picked up by the launch in case Quan Mock missed his aim at the schooner's deck. In a final wrapper of cotton within a bit of oiled silk lay the huge pearl of lavender-pink.

Buck's hand closed on it, lest his crew get a glimpse. He shoved the gem into a pocket and walked aft.

"Make it south-by-west," was his order. "We're going to New Zealand."



SUPERLATIVE SAVVY

by Alex. McLaren

Author of "A Rimrock Judas," "Scrambled Brains," etc.

"IF THAT jasper's a cowpoke, then I'm an angel," averred Jeff Smoot, foreman of the Pothook D outfit.

"How come?" queried "Old Man" Dodge, owner of the ranch. "He was packin' all the earmarks of a cowhand when I hired him three days ago."

"Which goes to prove, Mister Dodge, that a two-gallon lid, wing chaps, fancy spurs an' a durned idiotic grin don't always make a cowpuncher—'ceptin' in the movies. He's a travelin' windjammer, an' the most devout bandit worshiper I ever accumulated stomachache listenin' to."

"Sho nuff?"

"That's right! He's got dime novel lives of every man what played the stickup game, from Dick Turpin to Poncho Villa, an' he reads 'em all day in the saddle, when he'd orter have his eyes peeled for stray steers. I can't run the ranch with them kind of hands."

And so it was that "Windy" Brophy—the nickname had been applied after his first hour in the bunk-house—a stranger in a strange land, found himself facing the dire necessity of rustling another job. In the three months following he worked on every worthwhile ranch in the Malapai country, his various terms of servitude ranging from a minimum of three days to a maximum of one week, until he became a range joke.

With the ranch possibilities exhausted, he turned to mining, and managed to hang on to a mill roustabout job at the Red Rover Mine for one week. He might have broken all previous records had not the shift boss caught him behind the ore bin eulogizing Black Bart to several very interested Mexicans. History repeated itself and Windy was once more a gentleman of leisure.

That morning "El Zorro" had held up the stage, depriving its passengers of inconsequential sums. When Windy reached Malapai, the wily bandit's name was on every tongue. He met "Chico" Romero, with whom he had worked on the Lazy Y, and they sauntered to a table in the rear of the Buckhorn Saloon. The conversation drifted to Windy's favorite topic—bandits in general and El Zorro in particular.

"I tell you he ain't nothin' but a cheap piker!" Windy exclaimed, training a pair of piercing blue eyes on the other, searching for the effect of the statement.

The Mexicans in the district gloried in El Zorro's nefarious exploits and the discomfiture of officialdom. Chico was no exception to the rule.

"Just the same, he is the fox he is named for," Chico retorted hotly, the words marked with just a tinge of native accent.

"*Superlative Savvy,*" *copyright, 1925, by Alex MacLaren.*

"In three years has he not made one monkey of every sheriff from Nogales to Santa Fé? Not one of the *valientes* has ever laid eyes on El Zorro—much less collect the big reward."

"I don't care what you say he's done, or what the sheriffs ain't done. I'm tellin' you that *hombre* don't know the first rudiments of the stickup game."

"No?" chimed Chico, with a confident smile.

"No!" Windy shot back. " 'Cause if he did, he'd quit this petty larceny stuff he's been pullin' an' put on a roundup what'd net him some real *dinero*."

"Maybe he will some day," Chico replied in singsong intonation.

"Never!" Windy's tone modified as he continued. "He ain't got the guts or the savvy to pull a big job. He needs some one to tell him that to his face—then show him how to turn the trick."

"And are you this *hombre valiente* with what you call the guts and the *sabe?*" Chico tried hard to confine his amusement to a smile.

"I'm that very guy! An' if it wasn't for there bein' honor in the same, I'd get out an' pull a job that'd make Windy Brophy's name chase El Zorro's off the front page in *The Malapai Howler*. But I don't want to butt in on another man's territory."

There was that indelible, silly grin on Windy's face, always robbing any serious statement he might make of its intended gravity. Chico's smile merged into loud laughter.

"Why not do it anyhow, Windy? El Zorro might hear of it, and send for you to give him lessons."

Windy's face was enriched by a broader grin.

"Not a bad idea a-tall!" He brought an emphasizing fist down on the table. "Funny, now, that I never thought of it. By gravy, I might do it, at that."

Chico had heard sufficient. Still laughing, he got up and sauntered out of the place. Windy remained seated, ordered another drink and downed it. He sat gazing into space and subconsciously marking out wet rings on the table with the glass. A search for the cigaret makings disclosed the Red Rover check, still uncashed in his pocket. He got up and went over to the bank.

The genial young teller smiled. He had heard Windy's reputation many times, and the sight of the ungainly would-be cowboy always gave him an inward laugh.

WINDY counted and pocketed the amount shoved through the window. His eyes lingered upon several piles of bank notes, on the counter.

"Ever been held up?" he asked casually.

The young man in the cage smiled. He could see no harm in Windy and his silly grin; moreover, there was a comforting sense of security in the proximity of electric alarm buttons and a big ivory handled forty-five.

"Hold ups wouldn't even get a start here."

"Better knock on wood. There ain't no joint immune what keeps the filthy lucre sittin' 'round in stacks like that." With that Windy walked out of the place.

At the corral, he saddled up and rode out of town.

That afternoon Jeff Smoot, and Bud Craig, his neighbor from the Pothook D outfit, dangled legs together from the edge of the Buckhorn porch. Their conversation centered upon the scarcity of good cowhands.

"If you're right hard up, Bud, you might get that there correspondence school puncher. I reckon he's still rustlin' a job. I passed him out near the mine a little while ago," said Jeff, grinning at what he thought a good joke.

Bud seemed surprized.

"You mean that bandit 'cyclopedia—an' that you saw him out to the mine while ago? He sure must be doin' some tall travelin' around today. It ain't but a short while since I saw him out in front of Padillo's, sittin' mighty close to that Ramona girl. Padillo's is sure some ride from the mine—don't hardly seem possible he could make it."

"I've heard he was fixin' to marry Ramona Padillo. Long hard rides don't make no difference in a case like that." Jeff looked up the street at an approaching horseman. "Darned if that ain't him now, ridin' like the devil was after him."

Windy brought the sweat-lathered roan to its haunches, dropped from the saddle, and hurried up onto the porch. He paid no heed to the cowmen. Chico Romero was the one he was most interested in at that moment. He found and led him away from the intriguing influence of a slot machine to the rear table.

"Well, Chico, I got the whole scheme doped out. I'm puttin' on that big show in this burg tomorrow morning."

Chico felt jokingly-inclined.

"And is the *hombre valiente* with the *sabe* and the guts going to steal a railroad, a ranch, or will he just rob the bank?"

"Nope, none of them just now, but I'll probably tackle the bank later though. This job'll be quick, sure, safe, an' net us a good wad—then the publicity I'll get'll be no small item."

"Net us a good wad?" Chico questioned wonderingly.

"Sure—you're in it for an equal cut. Oh don't get scared—I'm the one that's goin' to do all the work. You'll help but you won't be seen. You'll be a mile away when it comes off."

Chico was interested to the extent of wanting the particulars. Windy leaned closer, reducing his voice to a hoarse whisper.

"You know I been workin' out to the Red Rover," he began, "but you don't know that I got on to one of their secrets. They're shippin' out ten thousand, or mebbe it's twenty thousand—anyhow a heap of gold bullion tomorrow."

"Bah!" Chico exclaimed in unveiled disgust. "You have one big fat chance—I don't think. Always the bullion is heavily guarded."

"I've a heap more chance than you think. Listen to me."

Chico listened with growing interest as Windy went on.

"Superintendent Nagle's wise to the fact that El Zorro's goin' to try an' annex that gold."

The statement staggered Chico for the moment.

"Where you get so —— wise?" he snapped out.

"Never mind where I got wise; just figger that I know what I'm talkin' about. Any how this is Windy Brophy's chance to beat El Zorro at his own game—to prove to that *hombre* that he's got a lot to learn about the profession."

Chico tapped the table impatiently.

"Well go on, let's hear the rest."

"There'll be the usual heavy guard, but in case that El Zorro should turn out stronger'n they figger on, they're sendin' a phony gold brick. The real gold'll go out to the railroad another way—which I know, but ain't sayin' nothin' about to no one right now. But if you'll agree to kick in with me, an' do what I tell you in the mornin', I'll guarantee to get that brick. An' as I said before, you won't be seen in it a-tall; you'll be helpin', but be a mile away from where the stickup is takin' place. I'll meet you in the head of Skeleton Cañon tomorrow night an' divvy with you. Meet me here in the morning an' get your orders."

Chico tried, but in vain, to get full particulars. He got up from his seat and stood nervously slapping his chaps with a quirt.

"Well maybe I will be here in the morning—*quien sabe?* I go to a dance at the Garcia Rancho tonight. I will think it over."

Mention of a dance awakened another interest in Windy.

"Dance at Garcia's, eh? Say, me an' my sweety—you know her, Ramona Padillo—might drift out there an' take on a few rounds."

"Yes I know her." Chico's eyes narrowed down to attenuated slits. "And have you been as confidential with her as you have with me regarding the plans for tomorrow?"

"Sure I have. She knows more'n I've told you, an' if the scheme turns out like we're sure it will, she'll be a mighty proud little *señorita*, sittin' pretty with nothin' to worry about."

"Then I am not so sure that I will come in with you," Chico announced. "You laugh at El Zorro and his methods, but I think he has successfully evaded the law so far by refusing to take any blabbering *mujer* into his affairs."

"But there'll be a woman in this, an' when it comes to real artistic work I'm goin' to put it all over El Zorro."

Again Chico tried to worm more information, and left in an air of disgust when Windy absolutely refused to enlighten him further.

Instead of attending the dance that night Windy sat in close conversation with Ramona on the young lady's front porch. It was late when he bade her good night and rode back toward Malapai. He circled around the town, to avoid being seen riding through, came into the road leading in from the opposite direction and rode south for about one mile. He tied his horse in hiding behind a brush thicket close to the road, and walked back to town.

If there was anything weighty on his mind, it didn't interfere with rest. He slept like a child until daybreak, got up and sat around the Buckhorn awaiting Chico's arrival. Chico came in weary-eyed and yawning. He had evidently been up all night.

"WELL?" was Windy's salutation in the nature of a query. "What's the answer?"

"Are you ready for tell what you was so —— scared for tell yesterday?"

"Sure thing!" Windy looked cautiously about to be certain they were alone. "The guard'll go through here as usual, but as I told you before, they'll be guardin' a phony brick. About an hour later Nagle'll drive in with his buckboard—kind of careless like. The other brick'll be on that rig under a pile of old sacks. Then's when I'll be gettin' in my fancy work."

"But just how will you get it?"

"Easy enough! I been watchin' that Nagle guy off an' on for three months. I ain't never seen him yet when he was able to pass through this burg without comin' into the Buckhorn an' unloadin' half a dozen drinks anyhow. I'm bettin' on him runnin' true to form today an' leavin' the buckboard at the hitch-rail."

"And if he does not?"

"I'll lay for him south of town an' stick him up in the reg'lar way."

"What am I to do?"

"You circle round town from the south to them old straw stacks in that field north of here. When you see Nagle comin' along the road, get ready. Give him plenty time to get here an' start lubricatin' his whistle; then set fire to one of the stacks an' beat it *pronto* for the head of Skeleton Cañon. The gang'll see the fire, an' ride out there on every saddle horse they can lay hands on, to keep it from crossin' the stubble to town. That'll empty the place of cayuses an' men, an' give me anyhow fifteen minutes' start."

Chico saw possibilities in the scheme. At any rate he would not be exposed if things turned out wrong. After exacting Windy's promise to meet him in the cañon, he left to carry out his part of the plan, and Windy settled down to a policy of watchful waiting on the Buckhorn porch.

The spring wagon and armed guard passed through without stopping. An hour later, Superintendent Nagle drove up, tied his team in front and entered the saloon. He never even glanced toward Windy sitting idly whittling Buckhorn porch furniture. A few moments later smoke rolled skyward in dirty brown clouds to the north of town, and Windy started yelling.

"Fire! Looks like the end of town's burnin' up!"

Half a hundred throats up and down the street took up the cry. Every available horse was mounted and headed at breakneck speed toward the fire. Those not getting horses ran behind on foot. Nagle, Windy, and the bartender only remained.

"If that gang can't corral it, there's no use of me going. I've got to be starting for the railroad pretty soon anyhow," said Nagle giving one glance toward his team, then entering the saloon followed by the bartender.

They were no sooner out of sight than Windy slipped from the porch, unsnapped the halter strap, and jumped into the rig. With one cut of the whip, he sent the team galloping south out of town.

The commotion brought Nagle and the bartender running out of the saloon. Nagle pulled his gun and fired several futile shots before the rig whirled from sight around a bend in the road, then started in search of a horse with which to pursue the robber.

Windy brought the team to a standstill in the road opposite where he had left his horse the night before. He rummaged beneath the pile of sacks in the rear, found the one containing the brick, and tossed it out as far as he could onto a bare stretch of bed rock. He fastened the reins to the dashboard, jumped as far as he could from the rig, hit the nearest horse with a stone, and stood watching the buckboard bouncing about down the road.

"The posse'll follow that for a while," he mused. "Till they find out there's no one in it—all of which'll give me a little more lead on them."

Careful to confine his footsteps to bare patches of bedrock, he carried the sack to where the roan stood ready. He tightened the cinches and rode away holding the sack in front across the saddle. The first few miles were covered in an easy lope, over trackless gray bedrock, winding in and out between huge boulders, and occasional cedars and *manzanitos* struggling for existence in seemingly hopeless fissures in the granite. Once, on looking back, he saw fast-riding horsemen, and chuckled when they disappeared in clouds of hoof-made dust down the road.

The mountains narrowed to a high walled box. Skeleton Cañon. Fresh horse-tracks heading up creek were visible in the scattered patches of damp sand. Chico could be but a short distance ahead. He spurred the roan to a faster gait in effort to overtake the Mexican.

Rounding a sharp turn in the defile, he heard something swish through the air; there was a tightening about his throat, a jerk that pulled him from the saddle, and all went blank when his head came with a thud against a rock.

When he came to, he was lying unbound on the hard floor of a cavern-like recess in the granite where a broad beam of light flooded through one opening. He sat upright, felt of a whirling head, and rubbed his eyes. A strange Mexican of about forty sat a few feet away smiling and toying a pistol in one hand.

"Well, Mister Windy Brophy," the Mexican chuckled. "It was plenty trouble for bring you here, but I must have the exquisite pleasure of meeting and conversing with the *valiente* who lays claim to so much of that—I believe yesterday you call it guts and *sabe*."

WINDY staggered to his feet, wobbling drunkenly toward the Mexican with hand outstretched and a sickly grin warping over his face.

"Howdy Mister Zorro! Sure proud to meet you. But if every one had to go through what I did to make your acquaintance, I don't wonder at your friends bein' so —— scarce."

El Zorro was taken aback. Windy's audacity disappointed him, for he had expected whining and pleading. His face took on sterner mien, and he clutched the pistol in a more business-like manner.

"What is your big idea, gringo?"

A bleeding gash in a throbbing head failed to stem Windy's enthusiasm.

"What's the big idea? Don't you get it? I should think after what I pulled today you'd be seein' where you need me in your business. It's pretty near time you was hookin' up with some one what knew the game right."

El Zorro laughed heartily.

"What, me—the famous El Zorro—go in partners with one who I held up more easy as I would rope one sick calf. Bah! You make me laugh."

"Laugh if you want to; I don't give a ——. But don't kid yourself into thinkin' you'd ever have landed me if I hadn't wanted you to."

"I have meet many strange people in my time, but for the pure gall—you are the limit. Do you mean for tell me you plan—you do all this for meet with me?"

"That's the dope exactly! You see, you bein' such an exclusive an' unusual sort of *hombre*, I just had to figger out an unusual way of gettin' to you, an' here I am already to throw in my superior savvy of the science of stickupery."

"You are crazy to think I would go partners with you now that I have the gold."

Windy came closer. He squatted on the ground, shaking a finger in El Zorro's face.

"It's you that's crazy or you wouldn't talk that way. If you had any savvy a-tall you'd see that tryin' to peddle that stuff would be a ninety per cent. chance of gettin' into the hoozgow."

"You think so, eh?"

"I know it an' that beats thinkin'. I've put in years a-studyin' the methods of the best of them, an' find that the majority got in bad by swipin' something they had to sell."

El Zorro was not an overly strong-minded person. His air of ego and cock-sureness was slowly fading before a pair of blue eyes that seemed fairly to bore into him with Windy's every statement.

"But you steal the gold yourself."

"Sure I did—to use it for a visitin' card." Windy winced as he ran one hand feelingly over a sore scalp. "But I didn't figger on gettin' handled so rough. I been keepin' cases on that Chico guy ever since me an him worked on the Lazy Y. I've had a hunch all along he was scoutin' on the outside for you, and I played it."

"Well, then, what would you do with the gold?"

Windy's eyes twinkled. He was nearing his goal and knew it.

"Forget the gold an' go out an' make a big touch of stuff with the eagles on it. Stuff you won't have to peddle. You've got a germ of talent, Mister Zorro, but it's goin' to take an educated guy like me to develop it in you. You been playin' a pikin' game all these years through lack of savvy.

"Is that so?"

"It is! For instance, you'll rob the stage an' get a few lousy dollars an' a hat full of phony jewelry from the passengers. Or mebbe you'll run off a bunch of steers an' sell them for one-quarter what they're worth. —— it all, man, can't you see there ain't no more risk pullin' a big one? An' the returns is a heap more."

El Zorro lit a corn-husk cigaret and passed the package to Windy.

"Have one *cigaro Mexicano?*"

Windy accepted, and El Zorro went on.

"You are so wise, perhaps you could tell me where in this country that big job is to be found?"

"Sure I can. I've had it all doped out for some time, but it wouldn't do no good to tell you. You couldn't put it over without my help—without me takin' charge of it."

"I might even make that concession." El Zorro looked cunningly at the other. "Where is it?"

"It's the bank in Malapai!" Windy exclaimed. "And if worked right, it's a big, safe an' sure bet. I'm the guy that can handle it—with the support of you an' your gang. An' after that I'll guarantee you can retire for life."

The statement was not without its weight with El Zorro. His eyes narrowed and he puffed the cigaret in deep thought. Windy walked to the cave mouth and stood looking out. Across the gulch, on a point commanding the approaching cañon, sat several Mexicans all armed with carbines. Windy recognized two of them only. Chico Romero and Juan Padillo, Ramona's young brother, a bare-faced lad not yet out of his teens. The sight of the boy in that environment was not overly-pleasing to Windy. He went back to a seat on the floor facing the bandit.

"I see you got that Padillo kid in the harness. Kind of risky usin' boys like that in this game—can't never tell which way they'll flop in a pinch."

"I suppose the sister is more dependable?" The query was accompanied by a sneer. Even at that, thoughts of either Juan or Ramona did not linger with El Zorro. There was another matter more to his interest. "So you think the bank a good bet, eh?"

"Yes, but not backed up by the likes of that kid. It'll be a man's job."

"He is just beginning to be useful to me. I can depend on him."

"Well I ain't got the same confidence in him you seems to have, an' if I go into the job, I'm goin' to engineer it. I've been studyin' the lay of the land an' got all the dope on that kale corral."

One of the Mexicans, a stranger to Windy, came in. He carried a carbine in one hand and a pair of binoculars swung on a strap around his neck. He addressed El Zorro in Spanish, but Windy understood perfectly.

"The posse has already ridden several times up and down the road. They have gone back to town without having discovered where the *señor* changed from buckboard to saddle."

Windy beamed at the information. It clenched another nail in his argument.

"You bet they ain't discovered it—an' they won't! That's where superior savvy an' engineerin' comes in."

El Zorro's hesitancy dissolved slowly but surely in the face of Windy's argument. His air of superiority and dominance faded. He listened resignedly to Windy's plans for the next day.

"First I'll arrange a little ruse that'll send the sheriff an' his gang scourin' the country down near the railroad lookin' for me an' that gold. That'll get most of the fightin' stock out of town. How many men you got, Zorro?"

"Five, but I have not count the boy—you say you do not wish him."

"I've changed my mind about him. Bein's Ramona's goin' to help, I'll use the boy; give the whole —— family a job."

El Zorro frowned. He started to speak, but Windy checked him.

"I'LL write her a letter—don't get panicky. You'll get to read it an' see I ain't slippin' nothin' over on you—an' one of your gang can mail it tonight at the railroad so's it'll have that postmark on it. It'll get into Malapai on the early stage in the morning, but Ramona won't get it. When that old postmaster sees 'Return to Patrick Terrence Brophy' on one corner of the envelope, he's goin' to give it to the sheriff, an' that *hombre* will be beatin' it for the railroad with every man he can muster."

"But there will be other men left in town," interposed El Zorro.

"Back up a minute till I finish unloadin' an' there won't be so many. That's where I'm usin' Ramona an' the kid. Chico didn't burn up all the straw today. There's three stacks left yet, an' the girl an' her brother can build a real bonfire. I'm stuck on that scheme it worked so good today."

One of the men was sent to where they had hidden Windy's horse. He rummaged through the saddle pockets and came back with paper and envelopes.

"You see I figgered this all out ahead, an' came prepared," said Windy, starting to write with the tablet on his knee.

The letter, just a line telling the girl he was hiding in a gulch near the railroad awaiting a chance to get away, passed El Zorro's inspection. Chico was sent to the railroad to post it, with orders to hurry back and help in the raid planned for the next morning. Juan Padillo journeyed in the other direction with an oral message to Ramona, while the others rolled in their blankets for a few hours' rest. Windy could not suppress a smile when the bandits carefully disposed of themselves on the floor between him and the cave entrance.

All were up at the crack of dawn. Chico had returned and with the rest sat in a circle listening to Windy giving final orders between bites of cold *tortilla.*

"We'll beat it down an' hide in the *manzanitos* on that point of rocks just south of town—you can look right down Main Street from there. If I don't miss my guess, we'll be seein' the sheriff's outfit ridin' in a hurry right after the stage gets in. The bank'll open at ten, an' a few minutes later the town of Malapai will be threatened with a fire. Then right after that there'll be a stickup that'll go down in history, an' Windy Brophy'll make a lot of saps, what's been pokin' fun at him, sit up an' take notice. Let's go!"

He felt of his empty pistol holster, and looked questioningly at the others.

"Which one of you *hombres* got my gun?"

There was silence. The Mexicans all looked to their old leader. With Windy's scheme unfolded, messages sent out, and plans completed, El Zorro was fast regaining his old spirit of dominance. His eyes glittered cunningly—greedily.

"Your pistol is safe. It will not be lost," he said. "Does a *valiente* with the *sabe* and guts you lay claim to need a gun?"

Windy stopped short with hands shoved into his chap pockets and stood looking at the bandit. A grin came onto his face.

"So that's the way you feel about it eh? Want to get rid of me, now that I've shaped things up for you, by leavin' me in a position I'll be bumped off easy from? Or mebbe you're scared I'll clean up on the gang after we get the dough an' get away with it. All right, Mister Zorro, just to show you I've got all I've been claimin' to have, you can keep the gat an' I'll go through the deal without it—an' I'll lead the way into the bank."

He mounted and started down the cañon. El Zorro came close behind with the others following. Not a word passed between them on the long ride. They hid their mounts in the dry *arroyo*, climbed the point and crouched behind bushes, watching the people in town below moving about like so many ants.

The stage arrived and Windy readily recognized the old postmaster coming out for the mail sacks. He smiled confidently when he saw the old man hurrying across to the sheriff's office. A little later he directed his smiles point blank at El Zorro when armed men ran from the sheriff's office, mounted their horses and dashed pell-mell south over the road leading to the railway.

"That ain't so worse for figgerin' things out ahead, is it?" he asked in a whisper.

El Zorro paid no attention to the remark. His eyes were riveted on the region of the straw stacks. His watch was in his hand and indicated ten:fifteen when smoke commenced curling up from the back of the oat field.

"That's our signal fellers!" announced Windy, starting toward the horses. "Let's ride! By the time we get into the burg there won't be nothin' but cripples on duty."

They pressed their horses to the limit until the edge of town was reached, then rode quietly up a back street and turned into the alley between the bank and livery barn. Chico remained guarding the animals, while the others filed into the bank. Windy, unarmed, was in the lead.

Sleepy old Malapai came out of her lethargy in a manner surprizing to Chico. Armed men advanced on him from in front and behind. In a trap from which there was no possible escape, he threw up his hands as ordered, was shackled and dragged from sight into the barn.

Inside the bank, El Zorro brushed Windy aside and ran toward the cashier's window, waving a gun in each hand and yelling—

"Hands up and pass out that money tray!"

The young teller ducked from sight below the counter. The touch of some hidden spring dropped the steel wire wicket and it locked with a click. El Zorro and his men crowded in an excited cluster up to the window, beating on the grille partition with six shooter butts. Then, of a sudden the floor dropped from beneath, precipitating them to the cellar below. The floor closed automatically over them and they groped about, cursing and finding hard concrete walls all around. Windy escaped the plunge by a hair—but a miss is as good as a mile.

AN HOUR later the heretofore invincible El Zorro sat sullen on the edge of a cot in his cell. A step in the corridor and he looked up to see Windy Brophy grinning at him through the bars. It would appear that Windy was allowed the freedom of the long aisle between the cells. Also that recent happenings had in no way marred his usual sunny disposition.

El Zorro came forward with doubled fists.

"This is what I get for listen to the plans of a *loco*," he hissed. "It is the first time I ever slipped."

"Guess again Zorro—you made a bum one that time. You started to slip when you took that Padillo kid into the gang. Ramona had no notion of seein' her brother a bandit. She helped arrange the reception we got in the bank today."

"Is that so? Well even at that the officials will be only too glad to let me off easy—I have the gold brick which you stole. It is hidden where El Zorro only can find it."

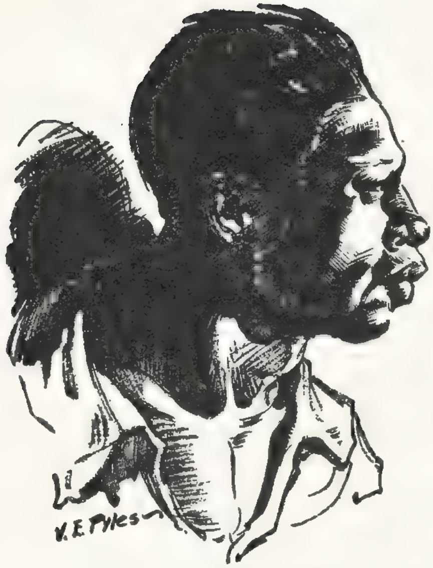
Windy laughed.

"Oh yes that brick. I forgot to tell you that they slipped the brass one on to the buckboard. I don't think they'll kick any on you keepin' it for a souvenir."

With that, Windy walked down the corridor. The deputy smiled and unlocked the barred door, and Windy walked out into the office. Superintendent Nagle was among the crowd surrounding the sheriff. He grasped Windy by the hand.

"Great work, Pat!" he exclaimed. "I knew when I had the sheriff here send for you that you'd turn the trick."

"Well, you want to give some credit to the Mex. girl," Brophy answered. "If I hadn't got on to her bein' so worked up over her brother's adoration of El Zorro, it might not have been so easy. Anyhow we've landed the *hombre*, and incidentally I've had a lot of fun playing a boob cowpuncher. Now I guess it's time I was getting back to Montana and my old position of Chief Special Agent of The Consolidated Mining Co."



THE WEASEL and the ELEPHANT

A Complete Novelette

by John Webb

Author of "North of Walling," "Three Kegs of Specie," etc.

"RIGHT below you, gentlemen, standing side by side, you see the two most singular characters on all the Western Ocean."

The half-dozen men passengers standing on the forward end of the intermediate liner *Penguin's* promenade deck looked in the direction indicated by the ship's purser. It was early afternoon. The ship was in the Caribbean, three hours out of Colon and bound for New York by way of the Windward Passage.

"Which two do you mean?" asked one, an oil man returning from the west coast of South America.

"Down there on the foredeck, Mr. Padgett, standing between the foremast and the starb'rd rail."

They leaned over the rail and looked down at the two men. One was a lean, lithe, tanned little man in an officer's uniform. For all of his slenderness, there was a considerable spread to his shoulders, which were somewhat sloping. His arms were exceptionally long, as were his hands, and the knuckles of his fingers were abnormally large. His nose was hawk-like, aggressive, and his mouth was thin and straight. His hair was jet black and, when sensing that he was being gazed upon, he turned slightly and flashed a glance up at them, they saw that his eyes were twin pools of ink.

The other man was a black deckhand. He was about an inch under six feet, a big, bulking, bear-like man who, when he moved, swung his body from side to side and dragged his feet. His face was square and flat and expressionless. His skin was so black and of such texture that it seemed to have been sprinkled with powdered charcoal. His hair was straight and long, not shiny, but of a dry duskiness. His brows hung like small sacks over tiny, dull eyes. His head was abnormally large, even for such a big body, and his face was a blank, entirely devoid of all sign of human emotion.

"By the four stripes on his sleeve, the man in uniform must be the captain," said Padgett. "But what is strange about him?"

"That is 'One-Two Mac'," said the purser simply.

Exclamations of surprize went up from the passengers, and they leaned forward the better to see the little man on the deck below.

"One-Two Mac! That little fellow? Why, it can't be! Do you mean to say—"

A man brushed Padgett aside and pushed his way to the rail. He was a man of medium height and build, with a muddy complexion and the face of a weasel.

"No!" he exclaimed. "That's not One-Two Mac. One-Two Mac's ship is the *Hawk*."

He stared for several seconds, then started back, his face filled with consternation. One-Two Mac had again looked up, and his darting glance had met the stare of the weasel-faced man. The latter quickly drew away from the rail so that he could not be seen from below. The little captain was still looking at the spot where he had been.

The weasel-faced man, seeing that Padgett and the purser were looking at him curiously, managed to don a casual manner.

"It's him all right," he said with a forced lightness. "I didn't know he had—had this ship."

"His regular ship, the *Hawk*, is laid up, and he took the *Pengiun* to relieve old Captain Parker, who is on leave," explained the purser.

"Oh, I see," murmured the other absently. He was wondering whether the captain had recognized him.

"So that is One-Two Mac, is it?" Padgett was studying the little captain on the foredeck with interest. "This is the first time I have ever seen him, though I've heard a lot about him."

"That's him," said the purser. "He is the greatest human fighting machine I've ever known or heard of. A hundred and forty pounds of steel springs, He isn't a bully or a ruffian, but he has made a scientific study of the physical weaknesses of men, and when he is forced into a fight he goes about it in a businesslike manner, with a definite plan of battle. He can pick out a man's weak points at a glance. He is like a panther in action, fierce, fast as lightning, and with not the slightest lost motion. He got his name from the way his fists sound when they land, *smack-smack, smack-smack*. I've seen him lick men who weighed thirty and forty pounds more than he did."

"That's in line with the dope," put in a sporty-looking, middle-aged man. "Look at little Joe Walcott, a welterweight. He used to knock out middles and heavies for exercise. And look at old Fitz, hundred and fifty-odd. He used to make heavyweights jump out of the ring. Fifty or sixty pounds handicap didn't mean anything to Fitz."

"Bunk!" cut in the weasel-faced man. "They were exceptions."

"Exceptions my eye!" retorted the sporty-looking one. "Exceptions in one way, yes. But it's in line with the dope that a big man is at a disadvantage when he fights a smaller man as long as the difference in weights is not beyond all reason, of course. I don't mean that a hundred-pounder can beat a two-hundred-pounder. Put two men in the ring, both in good shape, each with the same experience, and I'll put my jack on the smaller man every time."

THE weasel-faced man looked cautiously over the rail, and seemed reassured by the fact that One-Two Mac was still on the foredeck and had faced in the other direction. Perhaps the little captain had not recognized him after all, he reasoned.

"Any sporting writer will tell you that a good big man will always beat a good little one, Cowan," he said.

"They will not, not *any* sporting writer." Cowan shook his head vigorously in denial.

"Some will and some won't. I've been a fight fan for twenty-five years, and I always put a few dollars on any fight that I think is on the level, and I'm way ahead of the game. Speed and accuracy is the stuff, brother. Not brawn."

"But about the black man. What is strange about him?" Padgett reminded the purser.

"Why, he's a nonesuch, if you know what that means. He's a man-animal, a man without a brain, without a thinking brain, I mean. Mentally and physically he's like an elephant. Tell him to go and he'll go. Tell him to stop and he'll stop. Put a rope in his hands and tell him to pull and he'll pull like a locomotive till you tell him to stop. I think he can outdo an elephant in one thing, eating. If somebody doesn't stop him, he'll eat as long as there is anything, no matter what, to eat, and he'll keep on till he founders like a ship full of water.

"He can neither read nor write, and his vocabulary is under a hundred words. He doesn't even know his name. We sign him on as 'John Smith' and put a pen in his hand, and he manages to make some kind of a mark. He'll drink all he can get, but whisky to him isn't a stimulant, it's a drug. He'll sit there, the bottle in his hand, never saying a word or showing interest in anything, till he drinks himself unconscious. I didn't understand the technical terms, but an alienist we had aboard last trip examined John Smith and said that he thought a part of his brain had simply stopped working, gone completely out of commission, affected by hereditary disease, perhaps, he said."

"Is he dangerous?" queried Padgett.

"Well, no, not exactly dangerous, though he shows temper at times, like an elephant does, I've been told. He's very fond of candy, sort of a mania with him, and last trip there was a big fireman who started to tease him by offering him candy and jerking it away when he reached for it, like you see fools doing at the zoo. John Smith reached for the candy a dozen times, then he must have got tired of being teased, for he jumped for the big fireman, picked him up bodily and smashed him to the deck, then tore the candy away from him and ambled off chewing it like nothing had happened. There was a faint red glint in his eye, but I don't think he was really angry. If he had been, I think he'd have killed the fireman as easily as a man would kill a week-old kitten."

At John Smith's feet lay a huge triple-sheaved block, at one end of which was a large iron hook and several links of one-inch chain and at the other an iron shackle, the whole weighing close to three hundred pounds. The boatswain, an olive-skinned, blue-eyed Italian, with a few words and many gestures managed to convey an order to the thing that served John Smith for a brain, and the big black bent and, without the slightest show of exertion, picked up the iron block, placed it upon one shoulder, shuffled forward and laid the block on a hatch as if it were some fragile thing he was afraid of breaking.

"Whew!" breathed Cowan. "Did you see that?"

"I saw it," said the weasel-faced man.

He grinned, and went on:

"There's brawn for you. Nothing but. There's a man without a brain, a man far lower in mentality than a year-old child; a *man who knows not a thing about boxing,* has neither science nor cleverness or a fighting head, but I'd be willing to bet my last cent that in a fight he'd make your One-Two Mac take to the woods in sixty seconds."

"Nonsense," retorted Cowan. "One-Two Mac would cut him down to his own size and knock him out. The only thing this John Smith fellow could beat the captain at would be a tug-of-war, and then the captain would probably trick him off his balance and pull him on his face. I've never seen the captain in action, but if he's as good as they say, he wouldn't have much trouble handling any man who can't think, no matter how big and strong. It's the fast, heady, vicious little fellows who are hard to handle. The big lumbering giants are pie for a man who knows the game and can hit."

The other snorted scornfully.

"Cowan, you're talking through your hat—"

He suddenly broke off and swung about.

"I forgot something," he muttered, and went hurriedly off, turned into a passageway.

ONE-TWO MAC had started up the ladder from the foredeck, and he reached the promenade deck just as the weasel-faced passenger disappeared. The little captain smiled slightly with one corner of his thin mouth, and halting a few feet from the group by the rail, beckoned the purser with a jerk of his head.

"That man who just left, what is his name?" he asked.

"Why, I don't know, Cap'n, but I can find out. His room is No. 12. Just a minute, and I'll look at the passenger list in my office."

"Never mind. Room 12, eh? That's good enough. Thank you."

Captain Mac went straight to stateroom No. 12, which was an outside room, the door opening directly upon the promenade deck. He knocked, but received no answer and, after a short wait, knocked again, this time louder.

"Hello!" came a startled voice. "Who's there?"

"This is the captain. Open the door, please."

"Eh? What d'you want?"

"A word with you, if you please. If you will open the door—"

"Not now, I'm changing my clothes."

"Oh, bashful, are you? Well, I'll wait."

The little shipmaster smiled thinly as he rolled and lighted a brown paper cigaret.

"Can't you tell me what you want through the door, Captain. I—I don't feel well."

"Just a spell of seasickness, probably. Forget about it, and you'll be over it immediately. Seasickness is due entirely to the imagination, you know. I must see you face to face, and I'm waiting."

The door opened a scant foot and the weasel-faced man appeared in the opening. Captain Mac studied the man for a half-minute silently, then shoved the door wide open and stepped into the room.

"So it is you, eh, 'Doc' Stein? I didn't get a good look at you before, and wasn't sure. If I had been, I'd have kicked the door in on your face."

"What do you mean, sir?" Stein drew himself erect and glared angrily. "You have probably taken me for some one else, and had better be careful. Passengers have certain rights, you know, and you may run your company into a lawsuit."

"Cut it, Stein!" snapped Captain Mac. "I know who I'm talking to. You have cut off your mustache and got rid of your buckskin shoes, trick suit, crap-shooter's shirt, cane and silk gloves, but I know you. You shot Charley Chase to death when he caught you using strippers in a banker-and-broker game. That was five months ago, and the Canal Zone police have been looking for you ever since. Consider yourself under arrest, Stein."

Stein's air of assumed indignation fled from him, and his lips were trembling as he reached out and clutched the little captain by the sleeve.

"Listen, Captain," he faltered, "maybe we can fix this up between us. You're a good sport. I've got money."

"Save your breath, Stein. Chase and I weren't exactly friends, but I know he was a pretty decent sort.

"You were a fool, Stein," he went on, "to take a chance like this. Why didn't you stay in hiding? Where were you?"

"I was up the Chagres, but I couldn't stand it any longer—rainy season, heat, fever, mosquitos. I had to come down. I wasn't very well known in Cristobal, you know, so I thought I could get away with it. The *Penguin* was sailing the day after I got back, so I thought I would get out in a hurry. Before I made reservations I looked over the passenger list to make sure there was no one sailing who knew me."

He bit his lip and shook his head sadly.

"But I'm not trying to get away, Captain," he continued after a while. "I swear I'm not. I want to give myself up to the police in the States. I would get a square deal in the States, but not on the Isthmus. And it will make it easier for me if I give myself up. Maybe you'll let me give myself up? Will you?"

"H'mm," murmured the captain thoughtfully. "Well, I suppose it will be all right. Won't do any harm, anyway. All I care about is that you don't get away. When we get Sandy Hook abeam you come to my quarters and I'll lock you in the bathroom, and when we get to the pier I'll take measures to make sure you turn yourself over to the police. In the mean while you can just act natural and be good."

"And you won't tell anybody who I am? It would spoil it all if you did."

"I won't say a word. Your right name isn't on the passenger list, is it?"

"No, of course not. I made my reservations under an assumed name."

"You're safe enough, then. But I'll take that gun!"

Captain Mac patted a bulge in Stein's coat pocket, put in his hand and drew out a small automatic pistol.

"You won't need that."

"No, no. I don't want it. I—I forgot I had it."

When the captain had gone, Doc Stein cursed himself bitterly for his folly in not inspecting the *Penguin's* crew list as well as the passenger list.

"And I even let him get my gun!" he raged. "Oh, what an idiot!"

IT WAS nearly five o'clock when Stein left his room, and most of the passengers had left the deck to dress for dinner. The purser, Cowan and Padgett, however, were still talking together where Stein had left them. He strolled gloomily toward them and found that they were still discussing John Smith, who was now sitting on the forecastlehead on the anchor chain, gazing unseeingly out over the swelling Caribbean.

"The question is—is he sitting and thinking, or is he just sitting?" Padgett was saying.

"Perhaps you would like to go down and speak to him?" suggested the purser. "It's after working hours now, and his time is his own. Come on."

He led the way down the ladder, Padgett and Cowan following.

"Come on," called Cowan, turning to Stein.

"Aw, to —— with John Smith," growled Stein.

"Oh, come along. Why not?"

Stein followed, not because he was interested in John Smith, but because it was easier to go with them than to explain why he didn't want to.

"Hello, John," greeted the purser as he approached.

The huge black turned and stared at them with his little eyes.

"What were you thinking about, John?"

"Uh?" he grunted.

"What were you thinking about?"

He continued his unblinking gaze for a moment, then shook his head and turned again to stare out over the sea.

"You see, he doesn't even know what I mean," said the purser. And then to the black, "What are you looking at, John?"

"Uh?"

"I say what are you looking at?"

"Nawthin'."

"Nothing? You must be looking at something. What is it?"

"Nawthin'. Jus' look."

The purser gave it up.

"He's not looking at anything. He's just looking," he said to the others.

"John," said Padgett, "what nationality are you?"

John Smith looked at him for a moment as if trying to understand, then grunted and turned away.

"What are you, Barbadian, Hatien, Jamaican, Curacoan, Virgin Islander?"

John Smith suddenly stood up, put his head back, wrinkled his nose like a dog, sniffed. Then he grunted and shambled off.

"He smells eats," explained the purser, and called, "Hey, John, wait a minute."

He strode after the big black and clutched him by his muscular arm.

"Wait, John. I've got something for you."

The black halted, reluctant but obedient, his nose still wrinkled and sniffing eagerly.

"Candy, John. I'll give you some candy. You want candy?"

"Uh," said John Smith quickly, and nodded with a peculiar jerking motion of his huge head.

"You wait right here, then. You understand? Stay right here."

Motioning the others to follow, the purser went up the ladder and disappeared. A half-minute later he returned to the rail, in his hand a big red lollipop which he had got from the chief steward, who carried a small stock of such confections for the children of passengers.

"Catch, John."

The black spread his hand awkwardly for the lollipop which the purser tossed, missed it and scrambled after it as it struck the deck, pounced upon it and jammed it in his mouth, paper and all, the wooden stick protruding from between his thick lips. His tiny eyes glinted as he looked up at the purser, and in some vague way managed to convey thanks. It occurred to the watchers that if John Smith had a tail he would wag it to show his gratitude.

"Now he's my friend for life," said the purser, as John Smith went off toward the sailors' messroom. "Now he'll do anything I tell him to. Once you get his confidence, there's nothing he won't do for you, if you can make him understand. We had a cowardly little gutter-snipe of a messboy last trip, and I used to see him take a swing or a kick at John Smith every time he passed him on deck, and John seemed never to resent it. I was curious, and investigated, and found that the little snipe was giving John candy to let him beat him up, so as to get a reputation for being tough."

Stein's mouth had dropped open and he was staring at the purser with a far-away look in his eyes.

"And you say he, he'd do anything for candy, huh?" he said, trying hard to control his features.

"Anything. Why, for a two-for-a-nickel lollipop he'd let you string him up by the thumbs."

"Well, what d'you know about that!" exclaimed Stein, his lids flickering as he turned away.

That evening after dinner Doc Stein purchased a box of chocolate-covered cherries from the chief steward.

"I take a notion for candy every now and then," he explained easily.

HE TOOK the candy to his room and waited until night fell. Then, the box hidden under his coat, he went upon deck, and avoiding the promenading passengers, made his way forward to the forecastlehead, pitch dark beneath a cloudy sky. Passengers were not supposed to visit this part of the ship unless accompanied by an officer, but there being no one to bar his way, he ignored the rule and went along the starboard side toward the eyes.

Just when he had concluded that there was no one on the forecastlehead but himself and the lookout, he saw a big, motionless form bulking in the darkness. It was John Smith, leaning on the rail and staring with his little eyes unseeingly into the night.

"Hello, John," said Stein in a low voice.

John Smith neither moved nor answered. He lay against the rail like an elephant resting against a tree, his enormous head rolling slowly from side to side with the pitch and heave of the vessel's bow.

Stein repeated his greeting, and again receiving no answer, reached up and shook John Smith by the shoulder.

"Hey, John! What're you doing? Sleeping standing up, with your eyes open? Look what I've got for you."

John Smith turned ponderously and gazed into the cunning weasel's face at his side.

"I've got something for you, John."

"Uh?"

Doc Stein peered cautiously about. He heard the lookout whistling softly to himself in the eyes, but could not make out his figure in the darkness. He felt certain there was no one else on the forecastlehead.

"Candy, John," he whispered. "You like candy, eh? I like you, John, and I'm going to give you all you can eat. We're going to be good friends."

"Uh! Yus, me like candy," rumbled John Smith, an excited, eager note in his deep voice.

Stein took the box of candy from under his coat and started to untie the ribbon wound about it, but John Smith's big paw closed gently but firmly, like a slowly closing vise, over the box and drew it away. He did not bother with the ribbon, but crushed the lid of the box and tore it off.

Stein opened his mouth to tell John Smith to help himself, but the black man had not waited for an invitation. He had scooped one handful of the candies into his mouth. He followed it immediately with another, his thick lips smacking and the juice from within the chocolate globes trickling down his chin and dripping on the hairy pelt of his chest where his shirt was open in front.

John Smith's aim in life was a full belly; his god was a belly-god. If he dreamed at all, he dreamed of food—mountains and oceans of it. And candy was not merely a desire, it was a mania with him. He filled his mouth till his cheeks bulged like black baseballs, and the wind whistled through his broad nostrils as he fought for air. John Smith, unlike the elephant, was not a dainty eater.

"That's the boy! Throw it into you," applauded Stein. "Plenty more where that came from, John."

The box was empty; John Smith peered into it and felt about with his thick fingers to dispel all doubt on that point. He dropped the box to the deck, where the wind picked it up and whisked it overside. He grunted and looked expectantly at Stein, his very posture expressing his desire for more.

Stein chewed on his lip and studied the black man thoughtfully. He was cunning, was Klein. Notwithstanding his mistake in not inspecting the *Penguin's* crew list, he was far from a fool. He determined that that one mistake should wait in vain for a companion. He need not hurry. The ship would not have Navesink light abeam for six days yet, and six days would be plenty of time in which to fill in the details of his scheme, the outline of which he had already evolved.

"No more now, John. Later. Tomorrow maybe. Maybe tomorrow night. Big box of candy.

"You know me, eh? You remember? I'm your friend. I bring you candy and you do what I tell you. All right, eh?"

"Candy? Uh," rumbled the black. "Me like candy."

He stood there in the dark, a brainless, inarticulate Hercules, his feet wide spread to the heave of the deck, his giant's head rolling and bobbing as if its weight were too much for even that thick, corded neck and those great muscle-packed shoulders, his bare arms, each as big around as an ordinary man's thigh, hanging at his sides, while Stein went off wondering how much of what he had said had been understood.

"One thing is sure," he told himself with a chuckle, "I needn't be afraid of him outthinking me."

THE following night John Smith was again on the forecastlehead. He liked it here. He liked the silence and the dark, and the wind on his cheek, and the soft purl of the water stirred primitive emotions and vague desires.

There was no tie of any sort that bound him to the rest of humanity. Between him and the average deckhand there was a mental chasm greater than that between the average deckhand and a Voltaire.

The other hands ignored him, or noticed him only to make sport of him, to steal his blankets, hide his clothes, or throw things at him. His bunk was the worst in the forecastle, beneath a steam pipe which sweated and dripped water upon him. His seat at the mess table was the least desirable, and his food the leavings after the others had had their pick.

The work assigned him was always the hardest and dirtiest. He did not resent these things; did not even recognize them as things to be resented. He felt no resentment toward any one, nor had he ever experienced the warmth of friendship. He was merely a big, strong machine of flesh and bone, neither moral or immoral, kind or cruel, honest or dishonest. He was neither good nor bad, entirely negative.

So, as he leaned here on the rail, half-asleep, drowsing like a cat on a hearth, he was neither happy nor the reverse, but was content.

Doc Stein came forward as soon as it was dark, under his coat another box of chocolates.

"Hello, John. You know me, eh?"

But John did not know Stein. There was not the slightest sign of recognition in the small, dull eyes. Twenty-four hours was a long time, an age to John Smith.

"I brought you candy, John. Remember?"

The black grunted. Candy. Experience told him that those two syllables meant filling for the stomach.

"I've got more candy for you, John. Here it is. Hey, wait a minute!"

He nimbly eluded John Smith's groping paw and put the box behind his back.

"First you gotta do what I tell you, John. Then I'll give you the candy. Put your hands over your head. Right up. Like this, see? That's right. Now put 'em down. Now stand on one foot. Lift it up. Right-o! Put it down. Get down on your knees. Down. Right. Get up. Turn around a couple of times like this. Right around. Again. Turn round again. Again. That's the stuff! And here's the candy."

He handed the box to John, who tore it open and crammed into his mouth a handful of its contents.

"See, John, that's what you have to do," said Stein. "Do whatever I tell you to do, and I'll see that you get all the candy you can eat. Savee? Maybe you do and maybe you don't. But never mind, you'll catch on, stupid, old boy."

The box empty, John Smith was watching Stein in the manner of an animal that had just been given a meager meal and wants more. He gave a grunt of disappointment as Stein turned and started toward the passenger quarters.

Stein chuckled dryly, and his shrewd features twisted into a mirthless grin as he glanced back over his shoulder and saw John Smith still looking after him.

"I always thought I'd make a good animal trainer," he told himself.

Padgett and Cowan were standing at the top of the ladder that led up from the foredeck.

"Where have you been?" asked the latter as Stein came up.

"Me? I've been watching the porpoises leaping under the bow."

"Oh. Haven't seen that big black fellow around, have you?"

"No," answered Stein, somewhat startled. "Why?"

"Why? No reason. We were just talking about him. I was wondering if you had changed your mind about him being able to lick One-Two Mac."

"No, I haven't. He'd lick him easy. I'd rather fight an army tank than that big clown, dumb as he is. It might be a pretty good scrap, though, at that. I'd like to see 'em get together, wouldn't you?"

"I would not," said Cowan firmly. "It would be slaughter. I wouldn't want to see that poor fellow get beat up, and I guess the captain would do everything he could to avoid doing it. I like to speculate about what would happen if they did come together, but I wouldn't want to see it happen."

"I guess maybe you're right," agreed Stein, and went off to his room.

The following night, when Stein appeared on the forecastlehead, John Smith turned to him with something of expectancy in his manner. He was beginning to associate the sharp-faced white man with candy.

"You gotta do your stuff first, Jumbo," said Stein, holding the box of candy safely behind his back. "I'll give you some harder stunts tonight."

He placed his soft hat on the deck and walked a few feet away.

"Now, you bring me the hat. Pick it right up and bring it to me. That's the stuff! Who said you were dumb?"

Again he placed the hat on deck.

"Now, Jumbo, take this pencil and put it in the hat. Take it. Put in the hat. Let go of it. Right! I'll have to put you in the first row, first seat. Bring the hat and the pencil to me. Come on, pick 'em up and bring 'em here. Right!"

After a few more of such stunts, John Smith got his candy.

"Tomorrow night, see? Be here, and I'll give you your daily dozen and your candy. Get me? You do whatever I tell you, eh? Tomorrow night. Candy."

THE next night John Smith's training was more intensive. He was made to go from the forecastlehead down the port ladder the foredeck, cross to the other side and return by way of the starboard ladder. Then he was told to walk backward several times around a ventilator.

He was in the act of circling the ventilator on his hands and knees when heavy shoes sounded on the starboard ladder. Stein thrust the box of candy at the black man and went hurriedly down the port ladder. The newcomer was probably merely a seaman come to relieve the man on lookout, but Stein did not return to the forecastlehead. He kept on till he reached the promenade deck.

The month was December, and though it was not quite eight o'clock, the sun had been below the horizon for nearly three hours. The ship was in latitude 30, still south of the Gulf stream, and the weather was warm, but there were few passengers on deck. For some reason, passengers in a ship coming north from the tropics in the winter time are prone to stay indoors after passing San Salvador.

Captain Mac came down from the bridge and halted in the beam of light that came from the social hall, Stein saw him, and it occurred to him that he had seen the little captain come from the bridge at this time several nights. Perhaps it was a matter of routine, he mused, and decided to find out. Time was getting short, and it was imperative that he know more about the captain's habits than he now did.

When the captain had resumed his walk toward the after part of the ship, Stein beckoned a passing steward.

"That's the captain, isn't it?" he inquired, indicating the retreating shipmaster.

"Yes, sir."

"I notice he comes down from the bridge about this time every night. Is that part of the ship's routine?"

"Yes, sir. Eight o'clock inspection, sir. He makes a round of the ship and enters it in the logbook that all's well about the decks. Usually the chief officer makes the inspection and reports to the captain, but the mate got his foot caught in a winch about a week ago and can't walk very well, and the captain is making the morning and evening inspections himself."

"I see. Thank you, steward."

When the man had gone, Stein went swiftly in the direction Captain Mac had taken. Reaching the after end of the promenade deck, he went down to the saloon deck, and turned aft just in time to see the little fighting man round the after corner of the steam-steering room. He slowed his steps now, so as not to overtake the captain, and by the time he reached the taffrail Captain Mac had passed around the steering-engine room and was on his way forward.

Stein did not follow. His nimble brain had seen a possibility. The deck between the taffrail and the after end of the steering-engine room was not more than three feet wide, a sort of passage rounding the extreme stern of the ship. The taffrail, a half-circle of three iron bars, the upper one with a flat wooden casing, was about four feet high. The space between the rail and the steering-engine room, or after deckhouse, could not be seen from any other part of the ship. The space was unlighted save by the ship's sternlight, and the sternlight switch was fastened on the after side of the deckhouse.

Stein leaned on the rail and looked down at the wake of foaming water. He gave a grim, rattling chuckle and snapped his skinny fingers in his excitement.

"This is the place!" he muttered. "Right here! Switch out that light. Let's see."

He thought for a moment, and then:

"He comes around about eight o'clock," he went on. "And the purser said we'd have Navesink light abeam sometime between eight and midnight. Close work, but it's my best chance."

Confident, his scheme completed, and feeling now that it could not fail, he went to his room.

The *Penguin* entered the southern edge of the Gulf Stream, in latitude 34, just before sundown the following day. Wreaths of mist eddied and swirled over the surface of the sea. The air grew perceptibly warmer and remained so for a few hours, when it began to cool. And when, eight hours after entering the stream, the ship passed out of it, in latitude 36, there was a pronounced chill in the air and a promise of colder weather to come. In the afternoon those passengers who had warm clothing had begun to get them out, and those who had none had begun to wish they had. "Tropical tramps" who had been years in low latitudes and were coming north with outfits of clothing fit only for the tropics, looked thoughtful as they pressed their noses against their stateroom windows and gazed out at gray mist-wreathes twisting in the night beneath a cold, gray sky. The deckchairs had been gathered and stacked in rows against the rail. They would be used no more this voyage.

STEIN had given John Smith his regular nightly training and his box of candy, and when the sly gambler and gunman rolled into his berth, he was very well satisfied with the way things were going. The success of his scheme seemed assured. He felt that he had gained John Smith's confidence, and that the big black, with the reward of candy always in mind, would obey without question any order that should be given him.

He had trained John Smith just as an elephant trainer trains his beast to do what it is told; and just as the well-trained elephant obeys, so would John Smith, mechanically, unable to reason out the probable result of the thing he was told to do. John Smith had nothing to do with hows or whys, or with results. He was merely a machine in the shape of a human body. Doc Stein had become his brain, and a shrewd, calculating brain the weasel was, too.

Stein grinned to himself as he turned this thought over in his mind. Here he was, Doc Stein, himself a physical weakling, with a fine, big body—John Smith's—to do with as he willed, without the slightest risk of harm to himself or fear of retribution. The body, John Smith, would save the brain, Doc Stein, from the gallows. What happened to the body was of little consequence to the brain. The brain could stand safely aside while the body fought the battle and took the chances. And the body was inarticulate, could not explain; would not even be able to point an accusing finger.

All this was pleasant, and he slept the better because of it. A hardened crook, though a petty one, and cruel and cowardly besides, he had long since learned that a conscience is a useless, unnecessary, troublesome thing, and had cast it away.

The following day was to bring the *Penguin* into port. It broke cold and overcast, with a wet, biting wind out of the northeast. The officer on the bridge paced briskly back and forth, his hands in the vertical pockets of his greatcoat and his elbows sticking out at an angle. Now and then he ducked behind the canvas weathercloth as spray whipped over the starboard bow and swept the weather side of the vessel. White-coated stewards, when forced to come on deck, scuttled like frightened rabbits from door to door. The ship's speed had been increased and she was smashing into the sea with a short, quick, choppy motion, as if anxious to get the voyage over and done with.

After breakfast some of the deckhands appeared on the foredeck. They were all wearing sweaters and peacoats; all, that is, except John Smith, who neither had nor felt the need of sweaters and coats. He was wearing the same clothes he had worn in the tropics, ragged khaki trousers, faded blue cotton shirt open wide at the throat, flapping straw sandals, and a boy's-size cap that seemed continuously about to fall from his great head.

First, two husky men placed a long rope-and-wooden Jacob's ladder upon John Smith's broad back. Now, a twenty-five-foot Jacob's ladder, if properly made, is quite heavy. But it is not the ladder's weight alone that makes it hard to carry, but its weight added to its awkwardness.

A Jacob's ladder, when being carried, seems like a thing alive. It has a fiendish and cunning habit of unrolling and getting between its carrier's legs, dragging the deck, clutching in passing at any object that offers a grip. But John Smith managed it. His cable-like arms lifted the ladder from his back to his head, in the manner of a market-woman with a basket, and he marched off and disappeared beneath the promenade deck, the boatswain following to make sure that the big negro did not forget where the ladder was to go and walk around with it on his head for half a day.

The men who remained on the foredeck started to unlash a long, heavy strongback from the lee rail, and they had it on deck by the time John Smith returned, still followed by the Italian boatswain. They were to put the big spar on their shoulders and carry it to the after part of the ship, and the boatswain distributed his men along it in the way he thought most fitting, no doubt. That is, he placed three men under one end and under the other, John Smith.

The strongback on their shoulders, they staggered down the deck, or rather, the three men under the forward end of the spar staggered. John Smith strolled with no visible effort and without the slightest sign of strain on his square, flat face. The deck was wet and treacherous, however, and he slipped and, there being no one at his end of the spar to take the weight of it, went down on his haunches, the spar still on his thick shoulder.

He gained his feet in a moment, strongback and all, but there showed a gash on his cheek where the rough wood had slid and torn the flesh. Paying no attention to the cut, from which blood was trickling onto his shirt, he resumed the march with the strongback. John Smith was too docile a beast of burden to balk because of an injury.

"Bosun!" came a clear, cold voice from the bridge. "Tell those men to put down that strongback. Then come here!"

The boatswain, after giving the order, went quickly up the ladder to the promenade deck and thence to the bridge.

Captain Mac's long, muscular fingers clutched the boatswain by the front of the coat and shook him fiercely.

"Bosun," he snapped, "I don't want you to load that poor black fool up like a two-ton truck. You've got a good man but don't know how to use him. He'd try to pull the bower anchor up hand under hand if you told him to. First thing you know you'll make him a cripple for life. He's a mental cripple now, so don't make him worse. You have more sense than he has, and I expect you to see that he gets fair play. If you don't, bose, so help me—" he shook him again—"I'll get you in a dark corner and do a little work on you. Understand? Get along now, and put three men under each end of that strongback."

"Yes, sir! Yes, sir!" stammered the boatswain, touched his cap and left the bridge even quicker than he had come to it.

* * *

DOC STEIN, who all this time had been standing beneath the bridge, grinned inwardly.

"That's right, Cap. Take good care of Jumbo," he said to himself. "The big boob's gotta work overtime tonight."

That afternoon about three-thirty, Stein went aft. He surveyed the passage between the taffrail and the after deckhouse from several angles, to make certain that it could not be seen from the bridge or the passenger deck, then experimented with the sternlight, switching it on and off.

At last he nodded and grinned, satisfied. His plan seemed just as feasible now as it had the night before. He leaned on the rail by the whirring, clicking patent log and stared astern.

On the western horizon the New Jersey coast lay like a thick, blue pencil mark against the darkening sky. From shoreward a long, low, speedy-looking, gray power-boat was making out to sea. It changed its course slightly to pass astern of the *Penguin*. Doc Stein, watching curiously, saw a rough-looking man, probably the captain or owner, standing abaft the small pilot house and looking at the ship through a pair of binoculars.

"That's the stuff," mused Stein. "A rum runner going out to the fleet. Lots o' jack in that game. Maybe I'll get into it myself. I got enough capital to set me up with a good boat and—"

His words trailed off and he snapped his fingers excitedly as an idea popped into his head.

Another string to his bow would do no harm. Here was his chance! This rum runner.

Keeping behind the deckhouse so that he could not be seen from forward, he waved and beckoned with his arm to the boat. The man by the wheelhouse studied him for a moment through his glasses, then put his head into the house. The boat sheered so as to pass closer to the ship.

Stein looked hurriedly about the stern, and seeing a grating inside the steering-engine room, lifted it from its place and dragged it to the taffrail. He turned the grating over, took a pencil from his pocket and wrote on the clean white pine:

> A thousand dollars cash if you take me off this ship. Follow the ship and come close about nine o'clock. Flash a light three times. I'll jump overboard with a life buoy. Wave both arms if you agree.

He lifted the grating to the rail and dropped it over the stern.

He was quick of wit, that rum-runner captain. He ran his boat to windward of the grating, so that it could not be seen from the ship when it was lifted aboard. The boat slowed, and a man leaned over the far side with a boathook. The captain disappeared around the pilot house.

A half-second later he reappeared, and waved both arms above his head in a gesture of assent.

Stein rubbed his palms together gleefully. Now his escape was certain. The rum boat was an anchor to windward. His first scheme was by far the best, if it succeeded. If it should not, he would have the rum boat to fall back on. If all went well with his original plan he would ignore the rum-runner's signal at nine o'clock.

Consternation overtook him, however, as he started forward. It was getting dark now, and heavy clouds hung low in the north. Beneath those clouds a beam of light had stabbed and disappeared. Several seconds passed, then the light flashed again, and was gone.

Navesink, Sandy Hook!

He halted beneath the bridge, and cursed and gritted his teeth as he stared furiously at the white beam flashing with monotonous regularity on the undersides of the clouds ahead.

The purser came down the ladder from the bridge, and Stein stopped him.

"That light, it's Navesink, isn't it? How—how far is it?"

"Yes, that's Navesink Highlands. Looks close, doesn't it?" The purser smiled. "But it's fifty miles, the mate just told me. We'll have it abeam about nine-fifteen. There's a countercurrent here, and we're not making as good time as we were."

Stein breathed easier as the purser passed on. Still, it would be close. Fifteen minutes! What if the rum-runner should not follow the ship close enough, or missed its lights? And if his original scheme should fail.

"Close, close!" he muttered as he made his way below in answer to the dinner gong.

At seven-thirty he went to the forecastlehead, where he found John Smith huddled in the lee of a ventilator, shivering with the cold, but waiting patiently in the dark for the man who brought him candy. He arose and came forward eagerly as Stein approached.

"Not yet, stupid," said the gambler, keeping the box of candy beneath his coat. "Follow me. Come on."

He led the way down the ladder to the main deck and aft through the narrow port passageway to the stern. Arriving at the taffrail, Stein halted and explained to the other what he was to do, repeating it over and over, and mentioning often the reward John Smith was to receive when the thing was done. The negro grunted and mumbled in answer, and kept his gaze glued on the bulge of the candy box beneath Stein's coat. The thing he was to do was simple enough, but was beyond John Smith's experience, and Stein, when the speeding of time at last forced him to desist, was still somewhat dubious that he had been understood.

"Maybe you understand and maybe you don't," he finished. "Remember, you get the candy when the job is done. You get me now, don't you? Savvee?"

"Uh-huh," grunted John Smith.

"Well, you're dumber than I thought you were, but I guess maybe you do savvee, at that. Stand right here, see? And when he comes around—" Stein nodded grimly—"do what I told you."

THERE was a vertical iron ladder which led to the top of the deckhouse, and Stein went up it. His overcoat collar turned up about his ears, he flattened himself on top of the house, his eyes at the after edge, whence he could look down at John Smith who, armed with a heavy iron belaying pin which Stein had taken from the after shrouds and given him, waited patiently by the taffrail.

The clouds in the north had darkened and broadened. The northwest wind was heavy with mist and piercing cold. The loom of Navesink Light had brightened and spread steadily, till, shortly after seven, the light itself had risen above the horizon. Barnegat Light had been left astern and Sea Girt, with its one-second flash, was now only a few degrees forward of the beam.

Eight bells sounded softly from the bridge, and Stein reached down and switched out the sternlight. He looked astern, hoping to see the rum boat coming up, and thought he saw a gray shape in the darkness, but was not sure. The boat would, of course, be unlighted, he mused.

Risking the chance that he might be seen from the bridge if the officer on watch happened to be looking aft through the glasses, he sat up and looked over the forward edge of the deckhouse. The captain should be on his way to inspect the decks. In the light that streamed from the smoking room Stein could see a man and a woman, their coat collars high and their hands in their pockets, pacing back and forth at the after end of the promenade deck. He saw a steward pass with an armful of linen, and the wireless operator hurry by with a slip of paper in his hand. But Captain Mac was nowhere in sight.

Stein became impatient and angry, and one bell, eight-thirty, found him gnawing his lip and cursing bitterly at his luck. Was he to be balked by fate again? Of course, there was still the rum boat. But there were objections to his escape by means of the boat. Word would be wirelessed ashore as soon as he was missed, and even if the boat were not captured, his entrance into the Unired States would be known and the police would be on the lookout for him.

Then too, there was considerable personal risk involved in getting from the ship to the boat. Suppose he could not leap clear of the ship's propellers? Suppose the rum boat missed him in the dark, could not hear his shouts? And those long, black swells, they looked terribly cold. Icy water puts fear into the hearts of the most fearless and determined of men, and Doc Stein was far from being that.

And then, just as he was about to descend from the top of the deckhouse and send John Smith away, he saw Captain Mac above on the promenade deck. The little fighting man, his greatcoat flapping about his legs, paused for a word with the two passengers, then resumed his round of inspection. He went toward the ladder and disappeared, and a moment later Stein saw him coming aft on the main deck.

He stopped beside a boat and tried the gripes with his hand, then slacked the boat fall so the boat would rest snugger in its chocks. Again he came on. He arrived at the after deckhouse and looked in at the clanking steering engine, and Stein, lying breathlessly atop the house, hissed down to John Smith, still standing by the rail and clutching the iron pin:

"He'll be around in a minute, John. Do what I told you, now."

"Uh," answered the big negro, and looked squarely up at Stein.

"Don't look up, you idiot! Here he comes, turn round—"

He broke off and jerked back, lay flat and motionless, his heart pumping fiercely, and seeming to arise in his throat till his breath came in gasps. He started violently as he heard Captain Mac's voice:

"Hello! You, John? Man, you'll freeze stiff! What are you doing here all alone? Why, you've only a thin shirt on! What's that you have in your hand? Oh, a belaying pin. You found it and don't know what to do with it. Is that it, John? But I don't want it. Oh, all right, John. Go below now, and warm yourself."

The little captain continued around the deckhouse and started forward on the starboard side.

Stein clambered down to the deck and swung furiously upon John Smith.

"You —— mush-headed nitwit! I told you to hit him with that pin. Not give it to him! You—you—I don't know what to call you. You're worse than anything I ever—"

His rage overcame him, and he swung his fist and landed sharply upon John Smith's cheek. Twice more he swung, then kicked the black man viciously on the leg.

John Smith did not attempt to defend himself. He merely cringed and waited for the blows to cease. He did not even seem surprized. He did not know what he had done that was wrong, but he was used to blows and took them as a matter of course.

"Candy," he grunted, when Stein stepped back.

"Candy! I'll candy you! I'll kick your —— face in, that's what I'll do—"

He suddenly swung away from John Smith and stared astern. Yes, there it was again, the light he had seen out of the corner of his eye! Three times it flashed.

He quickly took a match-box from his

pocket and struck three matches one after the other, to show that he had seen the rum boat's signal. Then he ran to the port rail and took a life-ring from its rack. As he climbed to the rail with the ring, the box of candy slipped from under his coat to the deck, and John Smith, who had followed him, snatched it up.

"Uh," he growled, as his big paws closed upon and crushed the cardboard box.

Stein was poised upon the rail, one hand gripping a boat davit and the other the ring. He would have to jump far out to clear the ship's port propeller. He shuddered with fear and thoughts of the frigid water he was about to plunge into. A cold hand seemed to grip his stomach.

"Get away, you big mutt!" he snarled at John Smith. "Beat it! Here, take this with you!"

He swung his foot to kick the negro in the face, but slipped and fell on his back across the rail, at the same time dropping the life-ring and losing his grip of the boat davit. The box of candy, struck by the upward swing of his foot, flew from John Smith's hands into the air and fell upon Stein's chest, and the ribbon that was about it looped over a button of his overcoat.

STEIN teetered there for a moment, his head and shoulders over the water, unable to draw himself to safety as the ship's stern dropped in the trough. He clawed wildly at the boat davit, but could not reach it. He went backward and would have plunged to certain death had not his left leg become wedged in the space between the davit and the rail. The candy box ribbon became disentangled and the box fell into the sea.

John Smith cared nothing about Stein, but he wanted his candy that had been promised him. After getting the candy he had paid no further attention to Stein. But the candy had been snatched from him, and he had seen it on Stein's coat. He shuffled to the rail, wound his fingers about Stein's leg, and yanked the gambler aboard like a fisherman landing a fish.

"Candy," he mumbled, and his powerful hands ripped Stein's coat open without bothering to unbutton it.

His little eyes glinted with a wild, red light as he tore at Stein's clothing. The overcoat came off in two, ripped down the back and buttonless. John Smith wanted that candy, and was determined to get it. He kneeled on Stein and began to tear the gambler's clothes from him piece by piece.

"Get away! Let go!" screamed Stein.

He was now terribly afraid of this big black man with the red eyes. His fear generated strength, and he struggled frantically, and managed somehow to wiggle from beneath the crushing knee. He got to his feet, but was picked up bodily, whirled aloft and smashed to the deck, his arm twisted under his body. He rolled over and over, brought up against the deck-house and scrambled to his feet. Eluding the great hands that clutched for him, he started to run.

"Candy!" rumbled John Smith, a hoarse animal rage in his deep voice.

He lumbered after the fleeing Stein. The bulky, heavily muscled negro was like Kipling's elephant that could not run fast but could overtake a train if it wanted to. Though clumsy, awkward, running with a stiff-legged shuffle, he managed to travel with considerable speed.

He caught Stein when the latter turned to go up the promenade deck ladder, caught him by the ankle and hauled him down, threw him heavily to the deck and kneeled on him. Off came Stein's coat and his shirt in ribbons.

"Candy!"

"Help! Help!" shouted Stein.

He was insane with fear now. He twisted free of the clawing hands and leaped frantically up the ladder. Reaching the top, he turned and ran forward, one arm swinging limply at his side and a gripping pain in his side. He started for the smoking room, but the scrape and shuffle of heavy feet behind him told him he would not have time to open the door, and he raced past it and made for the bridge, to get to the protection of the ship's officers. What he wanted now was protection, not freedom. Had there been a jail handy he would have run directly into it. Anything to get away from this relentless, inhuman creature at his heels!

All the promemade deck lights were screened so as not to shine forward, and the bridge itself was kept in total darkness, so that the vision of the officer on watch would not be interfered with. Stein missed the port ladder, but did not turn back. He kept on around till he saw the starboard ladder against the sky, grasped the handrail and bounded up.

He was unfamiliar with the bridge, and the darkness bewildered him, but he heard John Smith on the ladder, and ran wildly till he collided with a stanchion, tripped and slid headlong into the port wing.

"Here!" demanded a sharp voice. "What's all this?"

A SLENDER form was bending over Stein, but the gambler was fighting for breath and could not answer.

"Answer, man! I'm the captain. What is it?"

"John Smith, he—he chased me—broke my arm. Look out! Behind you! Save me!"

Unable to escape, he crouched in the wing of the bridge and stared fearfully around the little captain at the huge, ungainly form rolling across the bridge toward him.

"John Smith! Stop where you are!" snapped Captain Mac, advancing toward the big black. "Stop! Do you hear me?"

But John Smith, a queer, gurgling noise in his throat, came on, his mighty arms outspread to block the escape of the man who had taken his candy.

Little One-Two Mac threw himself forward and drove his shoulder against the big man's body. The negro grunted and was momentarily halted. Then he swung one arm awkwardly in a half-circle, and his open hand struck the captain on the shoulder and sent him spinning.

"Help! Help!" cried Stein. "Get a gun, somebody!"

"Shut up, you fool!" commanded the captain. "I can stop him. I don't want to hurt him, but I'll have to."

He leaped at John Smith like a suddenly released steel spring. There sounded a short tattoo—*smack-smack, smack-smack, smack-smack,* and John Smith, the heavy pouches above his eyes ripped open and gushing blood, halted uncertainly, not because of the pain, but because he was blinded by the blood in his eyes. He wandered across the bridge and collided with the starboard rail, and would have fallen down the ladder had not Captain Mac caught him by the arm and turned him around.

"This is the captain, John. The captain—hear me? Are you all right, John?"

"Uh," answered John Smith, rubbing at his eyes with the backs of his hands. All thoughts of candy had gone, to give way to puzzlement at this strange thing that had happened to him.

The third mate had come from the pilot house, and the captain called him.

"Mister, have this man taken below and send the surgeon to him." He crossed to Stein. "It's you, is it, Stein? What's it all about? Come on, spit it out, or I'll sic John Smith on you again."

"No, no. I'll tell you," faltered Stein.

Coloring his story to suit himself, he poured it out, making no mention of plot to have the captain knocked unconscious and thrown over the stern.

"H'mm," murmured Captain Mac. "So you gave John Smith a box of candy and it fell over the side and he dragged you back and beat you up just as you were about to escape. Sounds fishy, that! Why did you give him candy?"

"Just because I felt sorry for him, that's all."

"Huh!" snorted the captain. "Fishier than ever!"

The third mate called from the wing:

"Navesink is abeam, Cap'n. Nine—twelve."

"Very well, mister." And to Stein, "And that reminds me— Here, what are you groaning about?"

"A dislocated elbow and a busted rib, that's what," answered the gambler.

"Oh! Mister Larkin!"

"Sir?"

"Have some one take this passenger to his room, and station a quartermaster by his door to see that he stays there. Send him the surgeon."

"Yes, sir."

As Stein, a ship's quartermaster at his elbow, passed the smoking room, the door opened and Cowan came out

"Oh, hello," he said. "Where have you been? Say we've been arguing about One-Two Mac and that big negro seaman, John Smith, and the boys have about got me convinced that maybe Smith would lick the captain after all. I'm about ready to change my mind."

"About ready?" broke in Stein, as the quartermaster motioned him to proceed. "Say, I've changed mine already!"

The CAMP-FIRE

A free-to-all meeting place for readers, writers and adventurers

Our Camp-Fire came into being May 5, 1912, with our June issue, and since then its fire has never died down. Many have gathered about it and they are of all classes and degrees, high and low, rich and poor, adventurers and stay-at-homes, and from all parts of the earth. Some whose voices we used to know have taken the Long Trail and are heard no more, but they are still memories among us, and new voices are heard, and welcomed.

We are drawn together by a common liking for the strong, clean things of out-of-doors, for word from the earth's far places, for man in action instead of caged by circumstance. The *spirit* of adventure lives in all men; the rest is chance.

But something besides a common interest holds us together. Somehow a real comradeship has grown up among us. Men can not thus meet and talk together without growing into friendlier relations; many a time does one of us come to the rest for facts and guidance; many a close personal friendship has our Camp-Fire built up between two men who had never met; often has it proved an open sesame between strangers in a far land.

Perhaps our Camp-Fire is even a little more. Perhaps it is a bit of leaven working gently among those of different station toward the fuller and more human understanding and sympathy that will some day bring to man the real democracy and brotherhood he seeks. Few indeed are the agencies that bring together on a friendly footing so many and such great extremes as here. And we are numbered by the hundred thousand now.

If you are come to our Camp-Fire for the first time and find you like the things we like, join us and find yourself very welcome. There is no obligation except ordinary manliness, no forms or ceremonies, no dues, no officers, no anything except men and women gathered for interest and friendliness. Your desire to join makes you a member.

AFTER thinking it over I admit freely that if I were forced to face a grizzly with no other weapon than a bow and arrows I'd consider myself in very hard luck. If anybody were "on the run at 65 yards" it wouldn't be the grizzly. Here's a letter from a scoutmaster who, while he claims no grizzly for himself, can give us some more information on the revived sport of archery:

Snake River Council, Boy Scouts of America
Twin Falls, Idaho.

For several issues I have been interested in the discussion of Archery at Camp-Fire. I believe Camp-Fire would be interested in further information. You will find the rare old book, "The Witchery of Archery," by Thompson, to be a find for such a purpose. "The Book of Archery," by Hansard, is perhaps the original for the expression "stretching the long bow," as some of the feats therein stated are surely marvelous to a modern archer. In 1545 Roger Ascham wrote a practical book, "Toxophilus, or the Schole of Shooting." However, for real interest today, nothing can compare with "Hunting with the Bow and Arrow," by Dr. Saxton Pope of California. This is real adventure—wild Indians, cougars, deer, black bear—and grizzlies! Think of it—two archers stacking up against five grizzlies in moonlight, without a gun or any other backing! Think of killing a 1400-pound male grizzly on the run at 65 yards, with one arrow!

I HAVE my own archery equipment: hunting bows made of yew which I have cut and cured myself, and later fashioned the perfect weapon; other bows of lemonwood (a South African wood); ash, black locust, hickory (the poorest), osage orange, etc.; target and flight arrows, and hunting arrows with steel blades three inches long; and the rest of the equipment. I make obsidian arrow-heads just as the Indians did—and I make as good a point as all but the best artisans could.

By the way, last fall I was fortunate enough to win second place in a scout leader's archery tournament at Estes Park, Colorado, and am invited to the

Annual Tournament of the National Archery Association at Rome, N. Y., from Aug. 18 to 21. If you can get away, see this tournament. I am almost too far away to take it in this year. Get Louis C. Smith, secretary, 616 Old South Building, Boston, to send you a "Proclamacyon of the five and fortieth yerely Tournament"—it is interesting reading.

I neglected to say that Dr. Saxton Pope, with his archer companion, Arthur Young, and the author, Stewart Edward White, are now in Africa hunting lion and other African big game with the bow and arrow. I have an archer acquaintance, Rodney Wood, who lives at Cholo, Nyssaland, Africa, who is also going to try the long bow on lions this season. Personally, I hope for nothing larger than black bear, deer and mountain goat this fall, although I may be able to get an elk.—F. Douglas Hawley.

* * *

FROM Harold Lamb something in connection with his complete novelette in this issue. Step up and be introduced to *kurgans* if you have not already met them:

Kurgans such as the one mentioned in "Bogatyr" are in reality tumuli, or burial mounds. They are found in the vast steppes between Europe and the great wall of China.

I remember a Russian officer saying that in one mound near the Don River, a primitive cannon at least four centuries old was unearthed. The Russians used to dig into these mounds on the chance of finding gold ornaments, weapons and so forth, very much as we Americans calmly dig up the burial sites of Indian tribes.

THE similarity of the *kurgans* in Siberia, north of the Gobi, with those several thousand miles distant on the Black Sea, seems to indicate that they were built by the Mongols—perhaps in the age of Genghis Khan, perhaps in the day of Tamerlane (as we call Timur-i-lang). Perhaps in the time of the khanates of Central Asia—the Golden Horde, etc.—in the sixteenth century. No one knows for certain.

THERE are also found in the steppes curious stone warriors and women that face always to the east. And I think the figure monuments of Siberia are very much like them. The Cossacks relate that when these stone women are carried away, to make gate posts for a house in some Russian village, it takes a half dozen oxen to drag them to the west, although one can draw them back again. *Moi, je ne sais*—

At any rate most of the Cossacks are extremely unwilling to dig up the burial sites, the *kurgans*. A hundred years ago the British explorer, Clarke, asked the Hetman of the Don Cossacks for some men from the village to help him the next day. The men were ready enough until they found out that he wanted to uncover a near-by *kurgan*. They refused point-blank—said it was unthinkably unlucky—and Clarke did not get a look at the inside of the mound.

SOME readers might very well think it a bit of imagination on the part of the author, to picture a village of Cossacks being ordered to go and settle in the wilderness, by the Tsar. But this custom of advancing the Cossacks *stanitzas* into the steppes of Asia was the chief means of Russia's expansion toward China—and into Alaska for that matter, or India.

Moreover, whole villages were not always sent. Five hundred or a thousand families would be ordered to transmigrate. As late as 1861 some Don Cossacks were ordered to migrate to the Caucasus, and proved rebellious. "But they soon recovered their senses," remarks a Russian historian, "and the colonization was effected *without resort to specially severe measures*."

As to the title, "Bogatyr," it is one of the oldest of Turanian words, meaning hero, or a valiant warrior. We find it among the Mongols of Genghis Khan (*Bahator*) and among the ameers of Timur-i-lang, in India, as *Bahadur*, and in Russia as *Bagatyr* or *Bogatyr*—"g" being sounded as "h" in that language.—Harold Lamb.

* * *

ONE of you sends in the following clipping from the Montreal *Gazette* concerning a pest in Australia that, it would seem, might be turned into a valuable asset:

Adelaide.

A new menace to the development of the interior pastoral or cattle country consists of the herds of wild horses, which, according to the estimate of a leading authority, probably run into hundreds of thousands. He urged the Government this morning to introduce legislation for the eradication of the pest, which is possibly worse than wild dogs. Years ago many horses were taken far north for the purpose of breeding remounts for the Indian army and draught horses, but this project was abandoned and since then breeding has been uncontrolled, with the result that brambles are overrunning the country, consuming water and food to the detriment and danger of valuable stock.

* * *

SOMETHING from H. Bedford-Jones concerning the facts back of his serial story beginning in this issue. And I think you will find the facts back of this story very remarkable ones.

I have slightly altered facts in regard to the man named in French records as "Catchedour." He was actually nabbed while following his master, and was kept confined at Marseilles until the patriarch died in 1711, whereupon he was sent to Martinique with orders that a wife, presumably black, should be found "to recompense his fidelity." His name was Hatchadour Ketchedourian, the latter being the family name. His master was Avédis Vertábed, meaning Bishop Avédis, which is very different from the "Avedick Vertabied" of the French records. These names were put into their original form for me by an Armenian of high education in Paris. The mystery surrounding this whole affair gave birth to the false but widely accepted story that the Man in the Iron Mask had been confined at the Mont.

To reconstruct this place as it was in 1707 proved a difficult matter; not only the island itself, but the entire adjacent coast, has changed tremendously. The German commandant here from 1703 to 1719 belonged to a distinguished family of diplomats. To simplify his name of Jean Frederick Karck von Bebambourg bon Bemberg von Kirckenstein, I have used the form as it appears in French state papers of 1746—Baron de Karque.

Small details, such as the exact form and use of the *lettres de cachet*, are correct. I have taken advantage of the learned researches of M. Etienne Dupont, and have covered most of the ground in the story personally, in the effort to insure as much accuracy as possible.—H. Bedford-Jones.

* * *

A CAPTAIN of Coast Artillery asks to be excepted from our general rule against hearing any one talk at Camp-Fire without giving his name. Not only because we've nearly always been willing to make exceptions in the case of Army or Navy men but also because he calls down Leonard Nason and me and neither of us wants to dodge behind a technicality, I think there'll be no objection to his giving merely his initials.

Headquarters Reserve Officers' Training Corps,
College of Engineering and Commerce, University of Cincinnati.
Cincinnati, Ohio.

I have been a reader of *Adventure* for several years and have often been very interested in arguments and controversies in "Camp-Fire," particularly those relative to the accuracy of details in the fictional stories.

HAVING held several Army assignments which have brought me into close contact with civilians, I have found that the average civilian thinks that the Army's court-martial system is an autocratic machine which has no mercy for any enlisted man or officer who may be brought before it; that justice is the exception rather than the rule; and that one officer can severely punish a soldier almost without cause. An analysis of the misinformation which has caused civilians to conceive such ideas shows that the source of information is usually some acquaintance of the civilian, who has "stood" court-martial for some offense and who is naturally trying to "alibi." Another source of misinformation is fiction such as "A Sergeant of Cavalry," by Leonard H. Nason, in the June 20, 1925, issue of *Adventure*.

As a matter of fact I believe that impartial investigation will show that military justice is meted out under our court-martial system with greater speed, greater certainty, and more real *justice* than cases of a similar nature receive under any civil court now extant in this country.

IN MR. NASON'S story he shows that a non-commissioned officer was tried by Summary Court for a serious offense and received a sentence of six months confinement accompanied by forfeitures of two-thirds of his pay for a like period and reduction to the grade of private. In detail he is correct only in that it would be necessary to have a sentence include reduction to the grade of private. Everything else is wrong. A summary Court consists of but one officer, it is true, but a non-commissioned officer can not be tried by Summary Court without his (the non-commissioned officer's) consent; an offense as serious as that of *Sergeant Colburn's* would probably be referred to a General Court or at least a Special Court, but not a Summary Court; during the war and until the present regulations became operative, a Summary Court could not sentence a soldier to more than three months confinement and forfeiture of two-thirds pay for a like period.

Adventure has always prided itself on accuracy of detail. While Mr. Nason's story is very interesting and amusing where he intended it to be so, it does tend to foster erroneous ideas in the minds of civilians. Perhaps it is from reading such fiction that "A. S. H." who writes in "Camp-Fire," June 20th, issue, conceived his idea that "a court-martial does not bear the reputation of being a very reliable means of determining guilt" and the idea that "discipline produces autocrats who are accustomed to settling matters by their own yes or no without too thorough an examination."

OUR scheme of national defense prior to the World War was inadequate to meet great emergencies such as that war. We were forced by necessity to commission as officers many men who lacked experience in military matters and many who had poor judgment were commissioned during the rush; such a state of affairs was unavoidable under the conditions existing at that time. Many of these newly appointed officers were having their first taste of being in authority and many exceeded their authority; many officers and soldiers were also feeling their first bit of restraint and naturally got into trouble. These conditions were also unavoidable in a hastily organized army. Under our present scheme of national defense, young men are being trained to be officers in time of emergency and it is believed that in another emergency errors will be less frequent.

IT IS suggested that Mr. Nason, if he writes more stories dealing with court-martial procedure during the World War, study the Manual for Courts-martial, U. S. Army, *1917*, and that A. S. H. study the latest issue of same. The last Manual makes it very difficult for charges to be presented against a person subject to military law and makes it impossible to convict unless guilt is proved; in these respects, however, it differs but little from the 1917 edition.

The new Manual also cuts the maximum sentence which can be adjudged by a Summary Court to one month confinement and forfeiture two-thirds pay for a like period.

Undoubtedly there may have been some miscarriages of military justice, but I sincerely believe that these are less frequent than in civil courts and that the accused gets a square deal in a court-martial. It is true that there are few chances in military justice for a culprit to be freed on some technical ground, but that is in favor of the system rather than against it.—P. P. L., Captain, Coast Artillery Corps, U. S. Army.

WHATEVER may be the truth about courts-martial and however much I may be in the wrong, I can not see that Captain L. has any case against Mr. Nason. Captain L. is talking about the theory of courts-martial. Mr. Nason was writing about the practise of courts-martial—actual practise during a time of great stress, and Captain L., so far as I can see, wipes out his own case by admitting that during this time of stress theory was not followed in practise. However, Mr. Nason, who was present during the practise, is able to state his own case and does so.

Me, well, I'm one of the civilians who formed their opinion of courts-martial very much as Mr. Nason says. Also from so many instances (the Cunningham case for example) brought to my attention that I can't jauntily dismiss them all on the Captain's hypothesis but am compelled to fall back on such old adages, found by the acid test of time to be pretty good common sense, as "There are two sides to every question," "Where there is so much smoke there's likely to be some fire," etc. Add to this some knowledge of human nature and human institutions gathered as I've gone along (for a longer time, probably, than has the Captain), and—oh, there are plenty of Army officers and men, who haven't themselves suffered at the hands of a courts-martial and therefore have no need of alibis, who coincide in my low opinion of our courts-martial system.

JUST today a colonel called me to account for my "grouch against the War Department." I'm glad he did, for I am not one to help breed, as he said, any harmful attitude toward our national defense, I may have seemed such to others than the Colonel and am grateful to him for what was a needed warning against giving false impression. My grouch is against only the bureaucracy, jealousy, etc., that so often impair the efficiency of our defenses and defenders. To the military mind that in itself is heresy. And that too common attitude of the professionally military mind is exactly one of the things that impairs real efficiency. The military mind has been raised on the idea and practise that it is high crime for any one in the service to criticise that service. It also has the tendency to apply the same code to civilians—any criticism by anybody is, or ought to be, a crime and savors of treason. It forgets that army and navy are not the people but only an instrument of, and for, the people. It forgets the everlasting truth that any institution that suppresses or attempts to suppress criticism of itself is doomed.

I know the extreme need of discipline, of respect for authority, but I know also the vital need of authority that earns respect, of discipline instilled into Americans by other means than injustice and mere force, of free expression of free opinion outside the military body if not within it, and of quite a number of other things more vitally needed in the long run than discipline. A nation can not stand on discipline alone, a people can not endure on a basis of feudal and absolute despotism, nor on a diet of bureaucracy and red tape, any more than the sword can be an enduring law for the world or for a people or for itself. Even if the military minds were given their way they could not bring into being a discipline more excellent than that of Rome. And Rome is no more. Roman discipline itself could not stand against the more powerful forces at work.

NO, I have no grouch against the War Department as such, but I have one against its faults and I fail to see why it is entitled to be any more exempt from honest criticism than is any other democratic institution. No army is so important as the principle of free speech. And if you reply that many nations would not be alive at all if it were not for armies, there is the very easy and ample reply that a far greater number of nations would not be dead if it were not for armies.

As the colonel, reaching the end of his patience as he reached the end ofhis letter, so logically put it, there are as many——fools in the editorial field as there are in the army. Well, I don't see that that is a very roseate compliment for the army. It's equivalent to saying there are as many —— fools in the army as there are in the editorial field.

As to comparative freedom of speech between the two, well, after the colonel's remark I don't know. I'd say it was tolerably free.

And, in all seriousness, the loyalty that impelled him to call me a —— fool in so gentlemanly a manner is one of the things that is more valuable to the country and its army than is mere discipline and was born of something better than mere discipline. I think I understand the colonel and I know that I respect him; I hope he understands me and at least recognizes that I'm trying to be a good American according to my lights.

Now I'll get out of the way and let Leonard Nason reply to Captain L.

Biarritz, France.

Replying to the enclosed letter, I would like to state that in the past twelve years my work has brought me into close contact with soldiers of all ranks, and that the average soldier thinks exactly what the captain claims the average civilian does regarding court-martial procedure, and the power of an officer to punish a man for any or no cause. I would be very glad indeed to think that this opinion was due to reading my stories, but I fear that soldiers had formed their opinions on the matter long before I was born. As for civilians, I have the belief that they get their impression of the army from hearing some four million or so ex-soldiers express their views of it.

THE statement that justice is swifter etc., in military than in civil courts is nonsensical. Civil and military courts have different ends in view. The former protects society and the latter protects discipline. A soldier is rarely tried by court-martial for an offense for which he could be tried by a civil tribunal.

Regarding the specific charge that the court-martial scene in "A Sergeant of Cavalry" is all wrong, let's think about the text a minute. The summary court made some remarks on the charge, and so did the first sergeant. I made no statement, direct or implied, that the sergeant was being tried without his consent. The sentence was remitted, so that the captain has no real cause for complaint. We'll assume, however, that he had, and discuss each statement in detail.

"A NON-COMMISSIONED officer can not be tried by summary court without his consent." This is a bright regulation. Before the trial a charge-sheet is made out, bearing the authority for convening the court, the offense, etc., and the non-com accused is summoned to the orderly room and told to "sign here." Across the back of the charge is a typewritten statement that the non-com does not object to being tried by summary court. If he objects he is tried by special court, the maximum sentence of which is twice that of the summary court, and on which the officer who would have tried him by summary court will also sit. What, then, will his refusal get him? I never knew a non-commissioned officer to object. I again call attention to the fact that this did not enter into the story at all.

"An offense as serious, etc., would have been referred to a general court." About this point in the letter I began to doubt the captain's sincerity. There were few enough officers in the A. E. F. to lead the troops without detailing them to sit on general courts. I think there were some permanent courts at the different bases that tried cases of murder, rape, embezzlement and desertion, but I never heard of a general court anywhere else. I was in most of the big camps and I don't know of one where they could get a general court together without tying up the whole camp. And then supposing there were plenty of officers, a violation of the 61st article of war can be tried by any kind of court. For the purpose of enlightening the civilians who may read this, the 61st article of war states that anything you may do, from whistling before breakfast to failing to carry a divisional object in an attack, is subject to trial by court-martial, provided some one wants to have you tried for it. And note that the captain says "probably" himself. Well, why the kick here?

"A SUMMARY court could not sentence a man to more than three months." I haven't got a book here to see whether they could or not. It sticks in my mind that the captain is wrong. No matter. Even the writer of these lines was confined for forty-eight hours awaiting trial. It's against regulations to confine a non-com for anything short of murder unless he is violent, and then the man that does it is supposed to be pretty sure of his ground. Well, after said confinement I was awarded six months for being out of camp from reveille to reveille. I didn't serve it. We'd just landed in France, you see, and most of the casual company I was with joined me in the guardhouse during the forty-eight hours. I think we all got six months. However, by the time we pulled out of camp I was not only acting first sergeant but commanding officer of my own and another company—the bright lights attracted the officers too and they didn't have to come back to eat the way the bucks did—so the charge-sheets never were put on the service records. But assuming we had had to serve those sentences, how consoling it would have been to know that they were illegal! If a man was illegally confined, illegally tried, and illegally sentenced, to whom could he appeal? Once behind the barbed wire stockade a man stays until he serves out the time marked down for him on the guard-book, regardless of whether the sentence is legal or not. Who gave a ——? There was always lots of work to do and if the prisoners didn't do it, some one else would have to.

IT IS a dangerous thing to say that such and such an act couldn't have happened because it's against regulations. The first army motto I ever learned was that the regulations were written for —— fools and second lieutenants. As much sense in this as to say that no one drinks in the United States because the Constitution forbids it. The regulations are followed if convenient. And a man that stands up for his rights is called a guardhouse lawyer. He doesn't do it twice, either.

Lastly, the captain suggests that I read the book if I want to write about courts-martial. Well, I don't need to, thanks just the same. I've been before courts of all kinds, both as a soldier and an officer, and I've done my share of sitting on them. The system needs fixing up. It needs it so badly that even the Brass Bound Dumbells in Washington realize it. Wherefore they bring out a new manual every few years. How come that if the system doesn't reek to the skies?

The captain took a dig at me, I'm going to take one at him. I don't know much about the new army, but I've heard that it was a mad-house. And if the coast artillery have got to the point where they advise the other branches of the service on any military matter whatsoever, then I'll say that madhouse isn't half the word for it.—LEONARD H. NASON.

* * *

SOMETHING further on how Pike County and Piketon, Ohio, were named, from Arthur Woodward of "A. A." Born in Ohio, I ought to have been able to give this information myself. As it is, I'm glad to get it from Mr. Woodward.

Los Angeles, California.

It's seldom that I drop into a controversy on any subject which happens to be raging around the Camp-Fire but a note on Pike's Peak *versus* Pike County and Piketon, Ohio, happened to hit my eye so thought I'd contribute my quota.

I'm not an Ohioan, so can't qualify in that respect, but permit me to give the meaning of Pike County, Ohio, as it is stated by Henry Howe in his "Historical Collections of Ohio," printed in 1847. He says:

"Pike was organized in February, 1815, and named from General Zebulon Montgomery Pike, who was born at Lamberton, Mercer Co., N. J., January 5th, 1779, and was killed at the storming of York, Upper Canada, April 25th, 1813."

Speaking of Piketon, the county seat of Pike, Howe says: "Piketon, the county seat, was laid out in the year 1814. . . . Piketon was originally called Jefferson and was laid off on what was called 'Miller's Bank,'" The latter name was taken from the name of an early settler by the name of Miller who took up land at that spot in 1795, but a quarrel rose between Miller and another man by the name of Owens in which Miller was shot. His remains were buried on the bank which in later years gave rise to the name aforementioned. Going back still further, on a map published in 1755, the region in the general vicinity of Piketon was called "Hurricane Toms," possibly a French trader's station or the abode of some Indian chief. So much for Howe's bit in the matter.

Benson J. Lossing, the historian, in his "Pictorial Field Book of the War of 1812," speaking of Brigadier General Z. M. Pike and his fame says:

"He lost his life in the attack of York (Toronto) in April, 1813, when he was little more than thirty-four years of age. His name and memory are perpetuated, not only on the pages of history, but in the titles of ten counties and twenty-eight townships and villages in the United States, chiefly in the Western country." And that's that for Lossing.

IN MY own mind there is no doubt that Pike County and Piketon, Ohio, are named for the intrepid explorer and soldier. The fact that Pike was not born in Ohio signifies little. In those days, when the States were being laid out, there were a few Americans who remembered the deeds of the pioneers and honored them accordingly—and the emigrants and immigrants believed in being content with the U. S. A., gave her whole-hearted allegiance and didn't try to live with their feet on American soil and their thoughts and allegiance in Europe. Other counties and towns in Ohio are named after soldiers and statesmen born outside the State. It must also be remembered some of the namers served in the Revolution and held the memory of their commanders in high honor.

Putnam County, named for General Israel Putnam who was born in Salem, Mass., Jan. 7, 1718, and died at Brooklyn, Conn., May 29, 1790. Shelby County was named for Gov. Shelby of Kentucky, the Kentuckians having had a hand at settling the Ohio Country in the early days. Stark County took its name from Gen. John Stark of New Hampshire. And so on. I could name many more instances. Guess this is enough for the time being on the subject—hope it helps some.—ARTHUR WOODWARD.

* * *

AS FOR previous instalments of "Days of '49" we have at Camp-Fire what were originally the foot-notes for the last instalment of the story:

Chapter XXI

Depression in '49: The very brief business depression that fell upon California in the winter of '49 was preceded by a most sensational upward rise of values. "The mining districts soon became almost destitute of provisions, and the country impassable in consequence of the immense fall of rain. There was a reported scarcity of flour, and it rose in one day at San Francisco, from $16 to $40 per barrel, and in the mines from 30 cents to $1.50 per pound. . . . Many kinds of goods had become extremely scarce, and were selling at exorbitant prices. . . . The interior, or mining region, were entirely destitute, and merchants were in town from every point, trying to contract for the transportation of goods. Teamsters knew the country to be impassable, and although as high as $50, and even $100 per 100 lbs. was offered for a distance of fifty miles, no one would make the attempt. The consequence was, that miners were driven into town in many cases, to prevent starvation. . . . Business was transacted on a gigantic scale, and with an indomitable energy, but with a recklessness unparalleled. . . . A revulsion was inevitable. . . . All found themselves overwhelmed with liabilities, and with a very few exceptions, none could even make a fractional dividend in favor of their creditors."—*California Illustrated.*

"Lumber, worth $400 per thousand one month, would not pay for the freight four months later; tobacco, once worth two dollars a pound, was tossed into the street. Saleratus fluctuated between twenty-five cents and $15 per pound. The entire community was dependent for food and clothing upon other communities thousands of miles distant. And the rate of interest was ten per cent. per month."—Shinn's *Mining Camps.*

Chapter XXII

Masquerades: "Several doorkeepers were in attendance, to whom each man as he entered delivered up his knife or pistol, receiving a check for it, just as one does for his cane or umbrella at the door of a picture gallery. Most men drew a pistol from behind their back, and very often a knife along with it; some carried their bowie-knife down the back of their neck, or in their breast; demure, pious-looking men, in white neckcloths, lifted up the bottom of their waistcoats, and revealed the butt of a revolver; others, after having already disgorged a pistol, pulled up the leg of their trousers, and abstracted a huge bowie-knife from the leg of their boots. . . . If any man declared that he had no weapon, the statement was so incredible that he had to submit to be searched."—Borthwick's *Gold Hunters*. Chapter iv.

Evil Attractions: Helper, who wrote his *Land of Gold* with the idea of warning people away from California, presents this enticing allurement: "I may not be a competent judge, but this much I will say, that I have seen purer liquors, better cigars, finer tobacco, truer guns and pistols, larger dirks and bowie-knives, and prettier courtesans here, than in any place I have ever visited; and it is my unbiased opinion that California can and does furnish the best bad things that are obtainable in America."—p 67.

"Father" Taylor, San Francisco's famous street-preacher, had in the summer of '49 obtained the lumber for his house by going into the forest across the bay, felling trees, splitting them into lumber, rafting the lumber across the bay, and, practically unaided, built his home.

Chapter XXIV

Fire! San Francisco was five times destroyed by fire in three years. The first was the least serious. "The first of the series took place early on Christmas Eve, 1849, after one of those nights of revelry characterizing the flush days. It started in Denison's exchange, in the midst of the gambling district, on the east side of the plaza, next to the Parker House, the flames being observed about 6 a. m. Dec. 24th. . . . Although the weather was calm, the flames spread to the rear and sides among the tinder walls that filled the block, till the greater part of it presented a mass of flames. So scorching was the heat that houses on the opposite side of the street, and even beyond, threatened to ignite. Fortunately the idea occurred to cover them with blankets, which were kept freely saturated. One merchant paid one dollar a bucket for water to this end; others bespattered their walls with mud. . . . Buckets and blankets might have availed little, however, but for the prompt order to pull down and blow up a line of houses, and so cut off food for the flames. . . . While the fire was still smoldering, its victims could be seen busily planning for new buildings. Within a few days many of the destroyed resorts had been replaced with structures better than their predecessors. Toward the end of Jan., 1850, not a vestige of the fire remained. Cornwall contracted to raise the exchange within fifteen days, or forfeit $500 for every day in excess of the term."—Bancroft's *History of California*. Vol. vi. Footnote.—p. 202.

Ryan in his *Personal Adventures*, vol. ii, p. 405, records: "While the fire was still burning, one of the parties who had lost most heavily by the conflagration, bargained for and repurchased lumber to rebuild his house, and before six o'clock the same evening, he had concluded and signed a contract with a builder to reconstruct his house in sixteen days, under a penalty."

Chapter XXVI

This paragraph, descriptive of a mining camp's hotel, is lifted bodily from Helper s *Land of Gold*.

Chapter XXVII

Flood. "I estimated that one-third of the land was overflowed. Hundreds of cattle, horses and mules were drowned, being carried down by the rapidity of the current in their attempt to reach higher ground; and Sacramento City, then being without its levee, was almost entirely submerged. A small steamboat actually run up its principal streets, and discharged its cargo on the steps of one of the principal stores."—*Life on the Plains*. By A. DELANO. New York. 1857. (Delano evidently meant the cargo was discharged on the second story landing. At least Bancroft says "second story.")

In San Francisco: "By the continued passage of men, and of horses and drays with building material and goods, while the rainy season (which commenced earlier than usual, and was remarkably severe) was shedding torrents from the clouds, the different thoroughfares were soon so cut up as to become almost, if not quite, impassable. Indeed both horse, or mule and dray were sometimes literally swallowed up in the mud, while their owner narrowly escaped a similar fate. . . . Inmates of tents and houses satisfied themselves with placing a few planks, tobacco-boxes, bags of coffee, barrels of spoiled provisions, or any other available object across and along the worst part of the roads to enable them safely to reach their own dwellings. . . . Lanterns were indispensable to pedestrians at night, and even in daylight not a few would lose their footing and find it difficult to extricate themselves from their unpleasant predicaments. In those miserable apologies for houses, surrounded by heaps and patches of filth, mud and stagnant water, the strange mixed population carried on business after a fashion."—*Annals of San Francisco*.—p. 244.

Chapter XXIX

The Australian convicts were bold fellows; they swarmed into the city, and, it is believed, fired the city many times for the purpose of plunder. The second fire occurred May 4, 1850. The loss $3,000,000. "Sydney ducks" were suspected, and rewards of $5000 offered for conviction. Many arrests were made and led to nothing.

Chapter XXX

In California yet disputes occasionally grow out of the tangle of old Spanish titles, and in the early days, between the squatters, Spanish deeds and other claimants, a purchaser was hard put to determine ownership at times. Of the Spanish titles, Bancroft says: "There was usually no formal act of juridical possession, often no survey, and never a careful or accurate one. Boundaries were very vaguely described, if at all."

"Infinitely more sorrow, not to speak of blood, has it cost us to try to get rid of our old obligations to the Californian land-owners, than it would have cost us to grant them all their original demands, just and unjust, at once. Doubt, insecurity, retarded progress, litigation without end, hatred, destruction of property, bloodshed—all these have resulted for us from the fact that we tried as much as we did to defraud these Californians of the rights that we guaranteed to them at the moment of the conquest. And in the end, with all our toil, we escaped not from the net, and it binds our land-seekers still."—Royce's *California*. p. 468.

Conclusion

". . . After all, however, our lesson is an old and simple one. It is the State, the Social Order, that is divine. We are all but the dust, save as this social order gives us life. When we think it our instrument, our plaything, and make our private fortunes the one object, then this social order rapidly becomes vile to us; we call it sordid, degraded, corrupt, unspiritual, and ask how we may escape from it forever. But if we turn again and serve the social order, and not merely ourselves, we soon find that what we are serving is simply our own highest spiritual destiny in bodily form. It is never truly sordid or corrupt or unspiritual; it is only we that are so when we neglect our duty."—Royce's *California*. p. 501.

* * *

A COMRADE asks us to identify an old sword-guard found near the site of an old Army post. I referred Mr. Gill to Lewis Appleton Barker of the Edged Weapons section of "A A" who will doubtless be able to classify the relic, but some of you may very well be able to add to the information that any one man can give in such a case.

Washington, D. C.

I should appreciate having information sent me about an old sword-guard found in Nebraska near the site of old Fort Atkinson.

This guard is of bronze with seventeen stars, a seated female figure with foot upon a crown, and with two other crowns below. At the top are the words "E Pluribus Unum." Cut into the metal, where it would be concealed if blade were in place, is the number twenty-nine in this form, "XXVIIII."

Any conclusions that can be drawn from these meagre details will certainly be appreciated.—Corrington C. Gill.

* * *

HERE are two old friends brought together by our magazine without even calling "Lost Trails" into service. And after having lost track of each other for nineteen years.

South Manchester, Connecticut.

Some time ago you printed a few words of mine on the so called steel-jacket ball. About a week after this issue was out I received a letter from North Billerica, Massachusetts, from Lester K. Daniels. In 1905 I went to the Massachusetts Island Navy Yard Hospital when we came in from the China station. The ship went back to the station and I remained in the hospital. For some years I had been with Daniels at Newport and then on the West coast and then on the China station and in Guam, Ladrone Islands. I think Daniels and I were closer to each other as friends than any other two men in the ship, yet from December, 1905, until December, 1924, or January, 1925, I had not heard from him. We both wandered after leaving the U. S. Navy, yet both of us have now a fair education and good paying positions. Saturday, April 25th, Daniels and his wife came down and spent the week-end with me here in South Manchester, and we had a great talketalk. I wish to thank *Adventure* for bringing us together again. I watch the letters in "Camp-Fire" to see if any of the old bunch are sitting in but I guess most of them just read and don't write.—J. K. Broune.

* * *

IF YOU have no copy of the Declaration of Independence there is no longer any excuse for the lack. Here is another organization that distributes it:

Jacksonville, Florida.

I have read with great interest the remarks in "Camp Fire" regarding the distribution of copies of the Declaration of Independence.

As one of the national officers of the Independent Order of Minute Men, an organization devoted entirely to the Americanization of the new-comers to our Country and to reviving the spirit of the old patriots, who put patriotism above life itself, I will be very glad to send a copy of the Declaration of Independence to any one who will send me his or her address.

I will also further offer to any male, white, American citizen, who will write me that he has read the Declaration of Independence and that he believes in our existing form of Government, a free membership in this national order, which bars neither race nor creed and which puts Americanism above all else.

This organization has no financial gain as its motive—just the desire to assist in the great work of teaching our new citizens that there is more to Americanism than the dollar sign—Van E. Rouse, 305 Almadura Apts., 1489 Poplar Avenue, Memphis, Tenn.

* * *

SERVICES TO OUR READERS

Lost Trails, for finding missing relatives and friends, runs in alternate issues from "Old Songs That Men Have Sung."

Old Songs That Men Have Sung, a section of "Ask Adventure," runs in alternate issues from "Lost Trails."

Camp-Fire Stations: explanation in the second and third issues of each month. Full list in second issue of each month.

Various Practical Services to Any Reader: Free Identification Card in eleven languages (metal, 25 cents); Mail Address and Forwarding Service; Back Issues Exchanged; Camp-Fire Buttons, etc., runs in the last issue of each month.

VARIOUS PRACTICAL SERVICES TO ANY READER

These services of *Adventure*, mostly free, are open to any one. They involve much time, work and expense on our part, but we ask in return only that you **read and observe the simple rules,** thus saving needless delay and trouble for us. The whole spirit of the magazine is one of friendliness. No formality between editors and readers. Whenever we can help we're ready and willing to try. **Remember: Magazines are made up ahead of time. Allow for two or three months between sending and publication.**

Identification Cards

Free to any reader. Just send us (1) your name and address, (2) name and address of party to be notified, (3) a stamped and self-addressed return envelope.

Each card bears this inscription, printed in English, French, Spanish, German, Portuguese, Dutch, Italian, Arabic, Chinese, Russian and Japanese:

"In case of death or serious emergency to bearer, address serial number of this card, care of *Adventure*, New York, stating full particulars, and friends will be notified."

In our office, under each serial number, will be registered the name of bearer and of one or two friends, with permanent address of each. No name appears on the card. Letters will be forwarded to friend, unopened by us. Names and addresses treated as confidential. We assume no other obligations. Cards not for business identification. Cards furnished free *provided stamped and addressed envelope accompanies application.* We reserve the right to use our own discretion in all matters pertaining to these cards.

Metal Cards—For twenty-five cents we will send you *post-paid*, the same card in aluminum composition, perforated at each end. Enclose a self-addressed return envelope, but no postage. Twenty-five cents covers everything. Give same data as for pasteboard cards. Holders of pasteboard cards can be registered under both pasteboard and metal cards if desired, but old numbers can not be duplicated on metal cards. If you no longer wish your old card, destroy it carefully and notify us, to avoid confusion and possible false alarms to your friends registered under that card.

A moment's thought will show the value of this system of card-identification for any one, whether in civilization or out of it. Remember to furnish stamped and addressed envelope and to *give in full the names and addresses of self and friend or friends when applying.*

If check or money order is sent, please make it out to the Ridgway Company, *not* to any individual.

Expeditions and Employment

While we should like to be of aid in these matters, experience has shown that it is not practicable.

Missing Friends or Relatives

(*See Lost Trails in next issue.*)

Back Issues of *Adventure*

WILL BUY: October, 1914; and February and May, 1915 issues at $1 each.—Address RUDOLPH R. KREBS, 405 West Milwaukee Avenue, Fort Atkinson, Wisconsin.

WILL BUY: Issues for April and May, 1917. Would appreciate even the loan of them.—Address AMOS H. WEIGEL, Standard Publishing Co., 681 Fifth Ave., New York City.

WILL BUY: Issue for Dec. 30, 1922.—Address E. M. JENNINGS, Rosemary, Alta.

WILL SELL: *Adventure*, years 1922-1923. Seventy-two numbers. $7.50 for the lot, purchaser to pay carrying charges.—Address G. L. HICKMAN, 2304 Nicholas St., Philadelphia, Pa.

WILL SELL: 1st Nov. 1918; 1st March, 2nd Dec. 1919; 1st Feb. to 2nd Dec., 1920; 1st Jan. to Nov. 20, 1921; 10th June to Dec. 30th, 1922; all 1923, 1924, 1925 to date. Price on request.—Address J. H. JONES, 828 South Williams St., Denver, Colo.

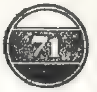
Manuscripts

Glad to look at any manuscripts. We have no "regular staff" of writers. A welcome for new writers. *It is not necessary to write asking to submit your work.*

When submitting a manuscript, if you write a letter concerning it, enclose it *with* the manuscript; do *not* send it under separate cover. Enclose stamped and addressed envelope for return. All manuscripts should be typewritten double-spaced, with wide margins, not rolled, name and address on first page. We assume no risk for manuscripts or illustrations submitted, but use all due care while they are in our hands. Payment on acceptance.

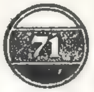
We want only clean stories. Sex, morbid, "problem," psychological and supernatural stories barred. Use almost no fact-articles. Can not furnish or suggest collaborators. Use fiction of almost any length; under 3,000 welcomed.

Camp-Fire Stations



Our Camp-Fire is extending its Stations all over the world. Any one belongs who wishes to. Any member desiring to meet those who are still hitting the trails may maintain a Station in his home or shop where wanderers may call and receive such hospitality as the Keeper wishes to offer. The only requirements are that the Station display the regular sign, provide a box for mail to be called for and keep the regular register book and maintain his Station in good repute. Otherwise Keepers run their Stations to suit themselves and are not responsible to this magazine or representative of it. List of Stations and further details are published in the Camp-Fire in the second issue of each month. Address letters regarding Stations to LAURENCE JORDAN.

Camp-Fire Buttons



To be worn on lapel of coat by members of Camp-Fire—any one belongs who wishes to. Enameled in dark colors representing earth, sea and sky, and bears the numeral 71—the sum of the letters of the word Camp-Fire valued according to position in the alphabet. Very small and inconspicuous. Designed to indicate the common interest which is the only requisite for membership in Camp-Fire and to enable members to recognize each other when they meet in far places or at home. Twenty-five cents, post-paid, anywhere.

When sending for the button enclose a strong, self-addressed, *un*stamped envelope.

If check or money order is sent, please make it out to the Ridgway Company, *not* to any individual.

Mail Address and Forwarding Service

This office, assuming no responsibility, will be glad to act as a forwarding address for its readers or to hold mail till called for, provided necessary postage is supplied.

Addresses

Camp-Fire—Any one belongs who wishes to.

Rifle Clubs—Address Nat. Rifle Ass'n of America, 1108 Woodward Bldg., Washington, D. C.

(*See also under "Standing Information" in "Ask Adventure."*)

Ask Adventure

A Free Question and Answer Service Bureau of Information on Outdoor Life and Activities Everywhere and Upon the Various Commodities Required Therein. Conducted for *Adventure* Magazine by Our Staff of Experts.

QUESTIONS should be sent, not to this office, but direct to the expert in charge of the section in whose field it falls. So that service may be as prompt as possible, he will answer you by mail direct. But he will also send to us a copy of each question and answer, and from these we shall select those of most general interest and publish them each issue in this department, thus making it itself an exceedingly valuable standing source of practical information. Unless otherwise requested inquirer's name and town are printed with question; street numbers not given.

When you ask for *general* information on a given district or subject the expert may give you some valuable general pointers and refer you to books or to local or special sources of information.

Our experts will in all cases answer to the best of their ability, using their own discretion in all matters pertaining to their sections, subject only to our general rules for "Ask Adventure," but neither they nor the magazine assumes any responsibility beyond the moral one of trying to do the best that is possible. These experts have been chosen by us not only for their knowledge and experience but with an eye to their integrity and reliability. We have emphatically assured each of them that his advice or information is not to be affected in any way by whether a given commodity is or is not advertised in this magazine.

1. **Service free to anybody, provided self-addressed envelop and *full* postage, *not attached,* are enclosed. Correspondents writing to or from foreign countries will please enclose International Reply Coupons, purchasable at any post-office, and exchangeable for stamps of any country in the International Postal Union. Be sure that the issuing office stamps the coupon in the left-hand circle.**

2. **Send each question direct to the expert in charge of the particular section whose field covers it. He will reply by mail. Do NOT send questions to this magazine.**

3. **No reply will be made to requests for partners, for financial backing, or for chances to join expeditions. "Ask Adventure" covers business and work opportunities, but only if they are outdoor activities, and only in the way of general data and advice. It is in no sense an employment bureau.**

4. **Make your questions definite and specific. State exactly your wants, qualifications and intentions. Explain your case sufficiently to guide the expert you question.**

5. **Send no question until you have read very carefully the exact ground covered by the particular expert in whose section it seems to belong.**

Please Note: **To avoid using so much needed space each issue for standing matter and to gain more space for the actual meat of "Ask Adventure" the full statement of its various sections and of "Lost Trails" will be given only in alternate issues. In other issues only the bare names of the sections will be given, inquirers to get exact fields covered and names and addresses from full statement in alternate issues. Do *not* write to the magazine, but to the editors of the sections at their home addresses.**

1—3. The Sea. In Three Parts
4—6. Islands and Coasts. In Three Parts
7, 8. New Zealand and the South Sea Islands. In Two Parts
9. Australia and Tasmania
10. Malaysia, Sumatra and Java
11. New Guinea
12, 13. Philippine and Hawaiian Islands
13—18. Asia. In Five Parts
19—26. Africa. In Eight Parts
27, 28. Turkey and Asia Minor
29—35. Europe. In Six Parts
36—38. South America. In Three Parts
39. Central America.
40—42. Mexico. In Three Parts
43—51. Canada. In Nine Parts
52. Alaska
53. Baffinland and Greenland
54—59. Western U. S. In Six Parts
60—64. Middle Western U. S. In Five Part
65—74. Eastern U. S. In Ten Parts
A. Radio
B. Mining and Prospecting
C. Old Songs That Men Have Sung
D 1—3. Weapons, Past and Present. In Three Parts
E. Salt and Fresh Water Fishing
F, G. Forestry in the U. S. and Tropical Forestry
H—J. Aviation, Army and Navy Matters
K. American Anthropology North of Panama Canal
L. First Aid on the Trail
M. Health-Building Outdoors
N. Railroading in the U. S., Mexico and Canada
O. P. Herpetology and Entomology
Standing Information

Animal Scents

INFORMATION from the best possible source:

Request:—"Can you tell me the ingredients of the animal scents that trappers use? Especially for 'coon, coyote, cat, cougar and mink.

I have heard old-timers tell about using an artificial scent or lure to attract animals to the trap, but have been able to get no definite information regarding the actual stuff used."—A. R. Meyers, North Bend, Oregon.

Reply, by H. F. Robinson:—Your request for scents or lures to use in trapping was referred by me to the predatory animal section of the Biological Survey.

I am advised that for coyotes, wolves and all animals of the canine species the very best lure, and the one used by the Survey entirely, is the urine of the animal you are trying to attract. In the beginning, you will not have the urine of the wolf or coyote, and in that case use that of a dog. The first one of the other animals you catch and it is alive, you can undoubtedly secure some of the urine. To use it, find along the trail where you wish to set the trap, a bunch of grass or a weed. Set the trap out of the trail and about 12 inches from the bunch of grass. Sprinkle 20 to 30 drops of the urine which you will have in a bottle on the bunch of grass selected, and about 12 inches above the ground, at the height a wolf or big dog would naturally deposit it, and if one of the coyotes or wolves pass along the trail he will investigate the scent left on the bush and in so doing will undoubtedly get one of his front feet in the trap. If you know of a place where a wolf is kept in confinement, the saw-dust or other litter in the cage will make a good lure.

For the felines—the cats, cougars, etc., the best thing found by the Survey is oil of catnip. It may be that you cannot buy this on the market. As a matter of fact the Survey is making their own. If you will write to the Biological Survey in Washington, D. C. you can find out about it.

For other animals I was unable to get you much information. If you will get copies of the hunting and sporting magazines I believe you will find advertisements for some of the lure bait for mink and similar animals.

Names and addresses of department editors and the exact field covered by each section are given in the next issue of the magazine. Do NOT write to the magazine itself.

Ocean Beach

A CUBAN settlement that has not been developed.

Request:—"My partner Mr. Yoke owns 100 acres of land at Ocean Beach. Lots 7 and 8, sec. 3, quarter 2, south ½ of 16, sec. 11, quarter 2, bought off the Canadian Cuban Land & Fruit Co., Prov. Pinar del Rio. Municipality Guaniguanico.

As farming here is running us behind, he thinks of sending me down there to start-up said land, since he bought it in 1905 he has done nothing with it excepting to pay taxes. Should you know anything of this location, would you kindly give us an idea of what can be grown there profitably, as an annual crop and otherwise, with the expenditure of two or three thousand dollars, and about how many acres would that amount of money equip and bring to bearing? I may add that the soil is black sandy loam, clay subsoil, fairly high with a little black palm.

Could you also advise me how transportation is from Ocean Beach to Havana by boat and rail?

Please find postage enclosed.

Hoping I am not putting you to too much trouble."—Heston F. Griffiths, Carstairs, Alberta, Canada.

Reply, by Mr. Montgomery:—Ocean Beach is in a locality that up to the present time has not been developed, that is, particularly along transportation lines.

The closest point to Ocean Beach on the United Havana Railways is Paso Real or Mendoza, which is about 24 miles in a westerly direction. Guane a large town and the terminal of the United Rys., is about 26 or 27 miles from Ocean Beach. There is a highway from Guane to Hato Guane which as Cuban Highways go is fairly good, and from there to the city of Pinar del Rio, which also is in good shape. Hato Guane is your nearest point to anything like a road and is 13 miles from Ocean Beach.

In a northerly direction you have Mantua about 17 miles from you, this is on the projected highway, but at present has only a road and at times almost impassable.

Ocean Beach lies between the Rio Salado (Salty River) and the Rio Guadiana (Guadiana River), about 6 miles from Ocean Beach is Lake Algodonal, which has water all the year around. The rivers vary according to the season, high in rainy season and low during dry weather, at times the flow is practically negligible.

As far as we can find there are no regular sailings from Habana to Ocean Beach, however the Empresa Naviera de Cuba do operate boats stopping at all ports along the coast, but the sailings are periodic and are advertised in local newspapers some time in advance.

In and around Ocean Beach farming of all kinds, if carried on scientifically, is profitable.

Prices of food-stuffs are high and there is no trouble in disposing of the products in the towns, but the transportation is the thing.

To reach a market with your products is the problem. The soil is rich, and has a steady base or physical structure and although not as rich as soils of other sections of the island, the turning under of leguminous crops and the addition of a small amount of fertilizer quickly renders them very highly productive.

At least one-half of the Province of Pinar del Rio including the coastal plain stretching along the shores of the Gulf of Mexico and the great southern plain that slopes away from the Cordillera de los Organos (Organ Mountains) throughout the entire length of the province, some two hundred miles, are exceedingly adapted to the cultivation of vegetables and small fruits.

Citrus fruits, strawberries, various plums, pineapples, figs, mangos, aguacate (alligator pears) and various tropical fruits can be grown here.

Some wonderful onions (Bermuda type), potatoes (Irish) grow, also eggplant, squash, peppers, etc.

Sweet corn is about the only vegetable not successfully grown.

Therefore you can see the choice is a broad one, but first you must find a way to get your products to the markets.

In the matter of transportation I have tried to get some definite information but as yet have not succeeded therefore will refer you to the following sources and ask that you take up the matter directly with them.

Mr. J. B. Frisbie, Secretary
American Chamber of Commerce of Cuba
320-24 Horter Bldg. Obispo 7.
Habana, Cuba.

Mr. T. P. Mason,
United Railways of Habana,
Habana, Cuba.

These gentlemen will be able to give you more up-to-the-minute information regarding the transportation facilities in your section of Pinar del Rio.

Labor is plentiful in and around Ocean Beach and at a daily wage of $1.75 to $2.00.

The usual custom is to secure a man with family and allot a small section of ground where he can build a thatched hut with palm leaves, for transient labor a shed is usually used, a place where they can hang a hammock.

Agricultural implements can be obtained in Habana at prices in reason, this doing away with the troublesomeness of importing direct.

Water is obtainable in sections and windmills are used extensively, however, the new type Delco Plant furnishing power for centrifugal or deep well pump, also lighting, is coming into use. There are no power stations near where you can secure light and power.

Tractors are the best bet for plowing even though the price of gasoline runs around $0.50 to $0.52 per gallon.

Frankly, Mr. Griffiths, with limited capital, it might be well to go slowly on this proposition, at least until you are absolutely sure of a market for your produce.

To get started you would have to clean your land and this alone requires time and is decidedly costly, if it is any way wooded.

Living quarters would have to be erected, food supplies purchased, enough for your workmen, as they all buy from your store, that is, it is customary to have a small store handling necessities only, and then your men deal with you; otherwise they go where they can secure those things easily.

Tractors are expensive and to get it to Ocean Beach would be a job, it would require a very considerable outlay of cash.

However a number of people are doing this very thing at present and no doubt as soon as roads are built or made passable it will be a profitable venture.

If I am able to secure any further information will let you have it as soon as obtained.

Japanese Customs

A COMPREHENSIVE view of a—to us—quaint life.

Request:—"I would heartily appreciate any information you would give me concerning the people and customs of Japan. As I am a writer, I was delighted to read of this marvelous opportunity that *Adventure* offers for gaining such valuable knowledge; and it would be a wonderful help to me in my story-writing if I could obtain it.

The following questions will, I think, give you an idea of the points in which I am interested. I am especially anxious to learn the answers to these if you would be so kind as to tell me.

1. Will you please give me some Japanese names of men and women that might be used in fiction?

2. What is the value of Japanese money and its purchasing power?

3. Will you please give me a few ordinary Japanese expressions that might be used to give atmosphere to a story set in Japan?

4. What are the customs governing courtship and marriage, and what is the position of women?

5. What are the general characteristics of the Japanese and their outstanding likes and dislikes?

6. What are the general living conditions, such as: attitude between employer and employee, home life, a general idea of beliefs and worship, etc.?

7. Are there European hotels in Japan? If so, will you please give me the names of a few with a word or two as to their grades?

If by any chance these questions should be printed, I should much prefer that only my initials be employed.

Trusting that I have not overstepped the boundary in the number of questions I have asked, and thanking you in advance for your kindness in giving them your attention, I am."—O. E. V., Yonkers, N. Y.

Reply, by Mrs. Knudson:—Now for your letter of February 9, and its questions:

1.

Names of families	Men's given names	Women's given names
Nakahashi	Uichi	O Kiku
Tokonami	Saburo	O Haru
Arima	Rokuro	Take-ko
Ito	Sumibumi	Fumi
Sumida	Katsutaro	Toki
Suzuki	Keu	Magarako
Imamura	Shin	Chikako
Fujisaki	Bunzo	Akiko
Yamamoto	Gitaro	Sumako
Tomishima	Hiroshi	Tsurn

2. The *Yen*, or Japanese dollar, is about 50c in U. S. money, *sen*, about half a cent. The purchasing value, from our viewpoint, corresponds to the foregoing valuation.

3.

Good morning,	*Ohayo*
Good bye,	*Sayonara*
Thank you,	*Arigato*
Please come in,	*O hairi nasai*
Please sit down,	*Dozo o kake nasai*
It is too dear,	*Amari Takai*
Come here,	*Oide nasai*
Let us go,	*I ko ya*
Stop,	*Matu!*
Go away,	*Ike!*
How much is it?	*I kura desu ka?*
Look here!	*Chotto!*

4. The strictly Japanese form marriage is more of a family arrangement than is the American marriage; personal desire does not count largely in it. Though you will find now that European and American training is modifying, amongst a few of the more progressive, even the marriage customs. So that it would not be an unthinkable thing to depict a modern Japanese youth as falling in love with a maiden and marrying upon that basis. Amongst the lower classes, attraction often rules a union. However, one in the upper classes departing from the custom might scandalize his family and friends.

Japanese good form decrees that the arrangement for a marriage be conducted through a middleman, or *nakodo*, when a boy or girl reaches marriageable age—from fifteen to thirty years old. This middleman is usually some close married friend of the family. He arranges the marriage, then acts through life as a godfather to the young couple—is often an arbiter in matters of dispute.

The *nakodo*, after fixing upon some eligible mate, then arranges for the "mutual seeing," or *mi-ai*. The lovers (?) may or may not be known to each other up to this time. In strict etiquette this meeting takes place at the home of the middleman, or at some other private house designated by both sets of parents. The middle and lower classes are not sticklers for form, however, and the "mutual seeing" may take place at a moonlight picnic, a theater party, a visit to a temple, or any similar gathering. If the man objects to the girl, that supposedly ends it. But, in strict practise, the parents may be and usually are obdurate in their wishes because of some advantage to be gained by the union.

If the youth and maiden are satisfied with each other, an exchange of gifts is made—clothes, money and certain kinds of fish and edible seaweed. This is the seal of betrothal. It is binding in custom and it would be a great disgrace to withdraw from the contract after this exchange of gifts. Upon the day appointed for the wedding, the bride leaves her home. She is dressed all in white, mourning, symbolic of death to her own family. At sunset the middleman and his wife escort her to the groom's home. There she dons a dress given to her by the groom, and the wedding takes place at once.

This is a ceremonious dinner party, during which the bride and groom drink the *san-san ku-do*, or "three three, nine times." Each, beginning with the bride, pledges the other by sipping three times, in turn, from each one of a set of three tiny lacquered *sake*, or wine, cups. The mild wine is usually dipped into the cups with a small ladle adorned with a paper butterfly. Immediately after this ceremonious sipping, the bride leaves the guests to put on a dress brought with her from home; at this time the groom also changes dress unless he is wearing European togs. At the conclusion of the dinner, the middleman and his wife conduct the couple to the marriage chamber. There they again pledge each other in nine more sippings from the set of marriage cups, but this time the groom drinks first as head of the newly created household. They are then left to themselves. The wedding is over.

The only legal ceremony observed is change of registration of the bride, upon notice to the public registrar, from her father's district to her new husband's district.

Three days later she ceremoniously visits her parents, wearing a dress given her by her husband. This is her *sato-gaeri*—"return home."

These are the foundation forms of the ceremonious Japanese marriage. They are, and always have been, frequently modified in actual practise. In some cases the groom is adopted into the bride's family and takes her name, particularly if the girl's family is without sons, or the groom is poorer or lower in social rank. Sometimes a marriage is solemnized by a Christian minister, if the contracting parties are Christian converts.

Women are supposed to obey their husbands in all things. The man rules the family, though his rule is often a mild and just one. One must never forget that many Japanese customs are being more or less changed and contaminated by European and American contact.

5. Courtesy. Restraint. See "The Spell of Japan," by Isabel Anderson. In a short letter I can give you no such "atmosphere" as this book can.

6. Read the above book for this question also. The general working conditions are very much as in this country. There are laws governing working hours. The factory head is humane or otherwise just as in America. Many big silk and other establishments have a welfare worker—woman—to attend to the needs of their female employees. The wealthy managers give picnics, lawn parties, bonuses to their workers. The same problems arise there as here. Strikes occur occasionally. Labor wages have kept mounting during the past years and laborers still clamor for "higher wages."

The home life in the ordinary middle class family has a kindly atmosphere, but strict discipline is maintained by the man of the house and ceremonious politeness is accorded him. In actuality the mother rules in most home things while the father looks after business. The mother talks servants, children, household matters, with her female friends. The father discusses business, recreation, philosophy, world news, politics, with his friends. The children conduct themselves as do children the world over, but are very respectful to elders, are self-disciplined, are early taught to control untoward emotion. They play games—London bridge, squat tag, battle-dore and shuttle-cock, are favorite ones.

In philosophy the Japanese are Shintoists and Buddhists mixed. See the book already referred to.

7. European hotels:

Tokyo	The Imperial
Kyoto	The Kyoto Hotel and Miyako Hotel
Nikko	Kanaya Hotel—Nikko Hotel
Nagasaki	Cliff House
Kobe	Oriental—Tor—Pleasanton
Chizenji	Lakeside

These are all first grade and are frequented by tourists—English, American, French, Swiss. Here and there are to be found English and American boarding houses.

Address your question direct to the expert in charge, NOT to the magazine.

Forestry

MOST of the State Universities have courses which prepare men for this interesting branch of outdoor work:

Request:—"I am interested in summer work on the forests, and therefore would be greatly pleased to get your advice as to the kind of work and location.

I am twenty-one years old and working in a greenhouse in this city. I have been working there about two years. Before this I have been attending school in the winter and working on the farms during the summer vacation. I have graduated from the high school and have attended a few semesters at the local normal school. This takes in all that I have been doing in the last five years. I have lived on a farm most of the time and can say that I am acquainted with the work and facts in farming. I done the general all around work in the greenhouse; as planting, transplanting, trimming, etc.

My intentions were to take a course in forestry at some college during the winter and work in the forests in the summer if possible.

Inclosed find a self-addressed envelope and stamps for return answer."—LEONARD PETERSON, Eau Claire, Wis.

Reply, by Mr. Ernest Shaw:—I can suggest nothing better than attending the State University at Missoula and obtaining work in western Montana or northern Idaho on one of the many National Forests located there.

Most of the National Forests are located along the mountain ranges of the States west of the Missouri and Mississippi. In the eastern States the Federal Government has purchased scattered areas under the Weeks Law on the heads of some of the navigable rivers, but the units are small and the number of temporary summer men are few, as compared with those larger solid units of the west. In western Montana and northern Idaho all of the work done in the summer season is made to coordinate with the principal activity which is the control of the fire situation.

It is serious. Even on a favorable year, the fire organization cannot be held down for fear of fire in the mountains getting out of control. For the past two or three years, it has been the policy to augment the regular Forest force and the usual patrol, lookout, and smoke chaser force, by the employment of crews working on roads, trails and telephone construction, which crews are placed at strategic points in the less accessible country, and are thus available for fire fighting on short notice.

It has found to work remarkably well, and in addition between fire or while waiting for a dry and dangerous period to culminate in many fires, much so called, permanent improvement work is accomplished.

Young college men who are unable to get positions in the actual fire organization can frequently get on one of the crews working trail or some other class of project, which really pays more money though the work is harder—in fact mighty strenuous at times. $2 to $3.50 per day and board is the going wages, depending on the kind of work and the supply of labor. Within the fire organization the pay varies much, depending on kind and location. Usually it runs $60 to $75 per month and board. Sometimes more without board, and the man grubbs himself.

Men who in school show a capacity for mapping and topographic work are sought by the Forest Service for its timber estimating crews. This work usually pays $60 per month and board, with an increase the following year if the man makes good. Men on such work are usually chosen from those who are taking the regular technical course in forestry, a four year course. Men from the short ranger courses, usually get on as guards or assistants to the rangers in charge of forest districts.

The area of forest units is usually around one million acres. Each unit or National Forest is again divided into ranger districts in charge of a permanent yearlong ranger who has civil service standing. The ranger's pay runs from $1220 at the beginning to as high as $1500 per year, but there are only a few of the higher salaried positions. However, in addition living quarters are usually furnished, and there is a travel and forage allotment—the latter where horses are required in the work.

Congress has stated its intention to re-classify the field force and when done there is little doubt that the salaries in the Forest Service will be found more adequate and equitable. Rangers have to be rather above the average mentally and physically, and only those men who prove their ability through a wide range of activities, and who have the mental balance which goes with vision and judgment, can hope to survive in the work.

The Federal Government is a hard task master and probably will never pay more than a fair living, yet many men find the work of the Forest Service so engrossing that they cannot break away from it, and most of those who do resign, are anxious to return when openings offer. I myself was in it as a ranger then as supervisor for more than 17 years, and constantly feel the urge to return, even though in a work which is interesting and which I enjoy together with the possibilities of much greater financial return than I could ever hope for in the Forest Service. The above is merely mentioned to illustrate the compelling interest which the work instills in those who have served long.

One word more regarding the point of how to "go after a job." You can realize that few supervisors care to employ men based wholly on correspondence with them beforehand. Therefore unless a man has some one to "leg" for him and in a way vouch for him, the chances of getting a position at long distance are slim. If I were in your place I would aim to land in Missoula with sufficient funds to carry me through the first year of school and a little besides. Then if you show that you are serious in your school work and your intentions, the chances are more than favorable, they are almost a certainty that you can get a job through the school.

I cannot tell you much about the expense. Residents of the State have free tuition although there are fees and other expenses. A resident can get by with about $400 per year. Hustlers can get by much lighter than that by taking care of furnace for room, or similar work. I know several men who have worked their way through at Missoula. But it's a grind. Also—but it can be done.

If you have something else in mind and will ask definite questions I am sure I can answer them. It is most difficult to reply to general questions.

If you don't want an answer enough to enclose FULL return postage to carry it, you don't want it.

Old Songs That Men Have Sung

Devoted to outdoor songs, preferably hitherto unprinted—songs of the sea, the lumber-camps, Great Lakes, the West, old canal days, the negro, mountains, the pioneers, etc. Send in what you have or find, so that all may share in them.

Although conducted primarily for the collection and preservation of old songs, the editor will give information about modern ones when he can do so and *IF* all requests are accompanied with self-addressed envelop and reply postage (*NOT* attached). Write to Mr. Gordon direct, *NOT* to the magazine.

Conducted by R. W. GORDON, 4 Conant Hall, Cambridge, Mass.

I AM very glad to be able to print two "song ballets" as they are called that were sent in to the department by Martha Carpenter of Dadeville, Alabama. Both are old and genuine. I print them without change except as regards spelling and punctuation.

The first is a curious version of an Old English song often called "The Paper of Pins." Usually after the bartering the "kind miss" consents; here the ending is somewhat different.

"Kind Miss, I have a very fine house
And also very fine yards,
That you may have at your request
If you will be my bride,
If you will be my bride."

"Kind Sir, you have a very fine house
And also very fine yards,
But who will be with me at night
When you are throwing your cards,
When you are throwing your cards?"

"Kind Miss, I have a very fine farm
Full sixteen acres wide,
That you may have at your request
If you will be my bride,
If you will be my bride."

"Kind Sir, you have a very fine farm
Full sixteen acres wide,
But the hogs may root it all over in one day
Before I will be your bride,
Before I will be your bride."

"Kind Miss, I have a very fine horse
Can prance those streets so gay,
That you may have at your request
If you will marry me,
If you will marry me."

"Kind Sir, you have a very fine horse
That prances those streets so gay,
But his master has toted bottles over him
Till I am afraid he will run away,
Till I am afraid he will run away."

"Kind Miss, I have a very fine horse
Can pull my buggy so well
I will drink my liquor and throw my cards,
And you may go to hell
And you may go to hell."

"When you get old and chilly with cold
I hope to my God you will freeze!"
"When I get old and chilly with cold,
I will have no drunkard to please,
I will have no drunkard to please!"

THE second is the brief biography and repentance of a "rambling boy" and has a refrain at the end of each verse.

The Rambling Boy

(Text of M. C., Dadeville, Alabama.)

When I was a young man I was very rich
I courted a poor girl who had no estate
Fiddling and dancing I spent all my store
I will be a good boy and do so no more!

Her father was opposed to it and also her kin
The jail door stood open for me to walk in;
They jailed a hell-boy as you heard before,
I will be a good boy and do so no more!

I had not been in there but three-quarters of a year,
I was glad to get cold water instead of strong beer,
I was glad of the crumbs, boys, that lay on the floor,
I will be a good boy and do so no more!

I had a rich uncle who lived in the West;
He heard of my conduct, he could not take rest—
He came to the jail door, he paid up my store,
I will be a good boy and do so no more!

I will go home, I will go home, I will marry me a wife,
I will labor to maintain her the rest of my life;
I will labor to maintain her and lay up in store,
I will be a good boy and do so no more!

FROM another correspondent, who requests that I withhold his name, comes the following prison song, as learned from a prisoner in one of the branches of the Georgia State Penitentiary.

Behind the Stone Wall

(Text of W. F. B.)

It was in St. Louis City where I first saw the light,
Brought up by honest parents in the pathway of right;
I was left an orphan at the age of nine years,
And on my mother's grave I shed many tears.

I had scarcely reached manhood when I left my old home,
With some other fellow to the West I did roam,
In search of employment we scarcely did find—
We both seemed so poor and the people unkind.

Sharp points of anger we were made to feel;
We had no more money, were driven to steal.
It was back in St. Louis where we met our sad fate,
We were arrested on the street one night late.

The charge was burglary, the theft (it) was small,
But they said it would place us behind the stone wall.
We were marched the next day to the court house for trial,
My pal was downhearted and sad all the while.

We pleaded for mercy, but they had none at all;
They gave us five years behind the stone wall.
We were called the next morning and started to the pen;
We arrived there at midnight with (ten) other men.

That night in a cell on a pallet of straw,
I saw that I would never again break the law,
For there's none but your mother to bear your downfall
When you're a convict behind the stone wall.

The foreman came around, gave an ax and an awl,
Said, "Learn to be a cutter behind the stone wall."
(*Two lines missing.*)

Come all you kind friends, take a warning from me,
You lose your life's pleasure when you lose your liberty!
I've tasted life's pleasure, it's as bitter as gall,
It will lead you to a cell behind the stone wall.

DON'T put off sending in to me all the information you can that will be of service on the trip, the outlines of which were given in the last issue of this department. I am specially interested just now in getting hold of songs and singers within a hundred miles of Asheville, North Carolina, for that's where the collecting will begin.

Many of you live in the very district, others were born and raised there, still others have friends and acquaintances who can furnish information. Tell me what songs I should look for, and what people I should get in touch with. Write me a tiny note of introduction to friends who can help. There is still time for your letters to reach here just before the trip starts.

SEND all letters, and all contributions of old songs to R. W. Gordon, 4 Conant Hall, Cambridge, Massachusetts. *Do not* send them to the magazine.

THE TRAIL AHEAD

OCTOBER 10TH ISSUE

Besides the **complete novel** and the **two complete novelettes** mentioned on the second contents page of this issue, the next *Adventure* will bring you the following stories:

THE LEGACY MULE — *Alan LeMay*
When the bit snapped.

LA CAPITANE — *Claude Farrere*
The pirates took their last stand.

THE LAW OF THE COSSACK — *Kenneth Malcolm Murray*
In the hands of the Reds.

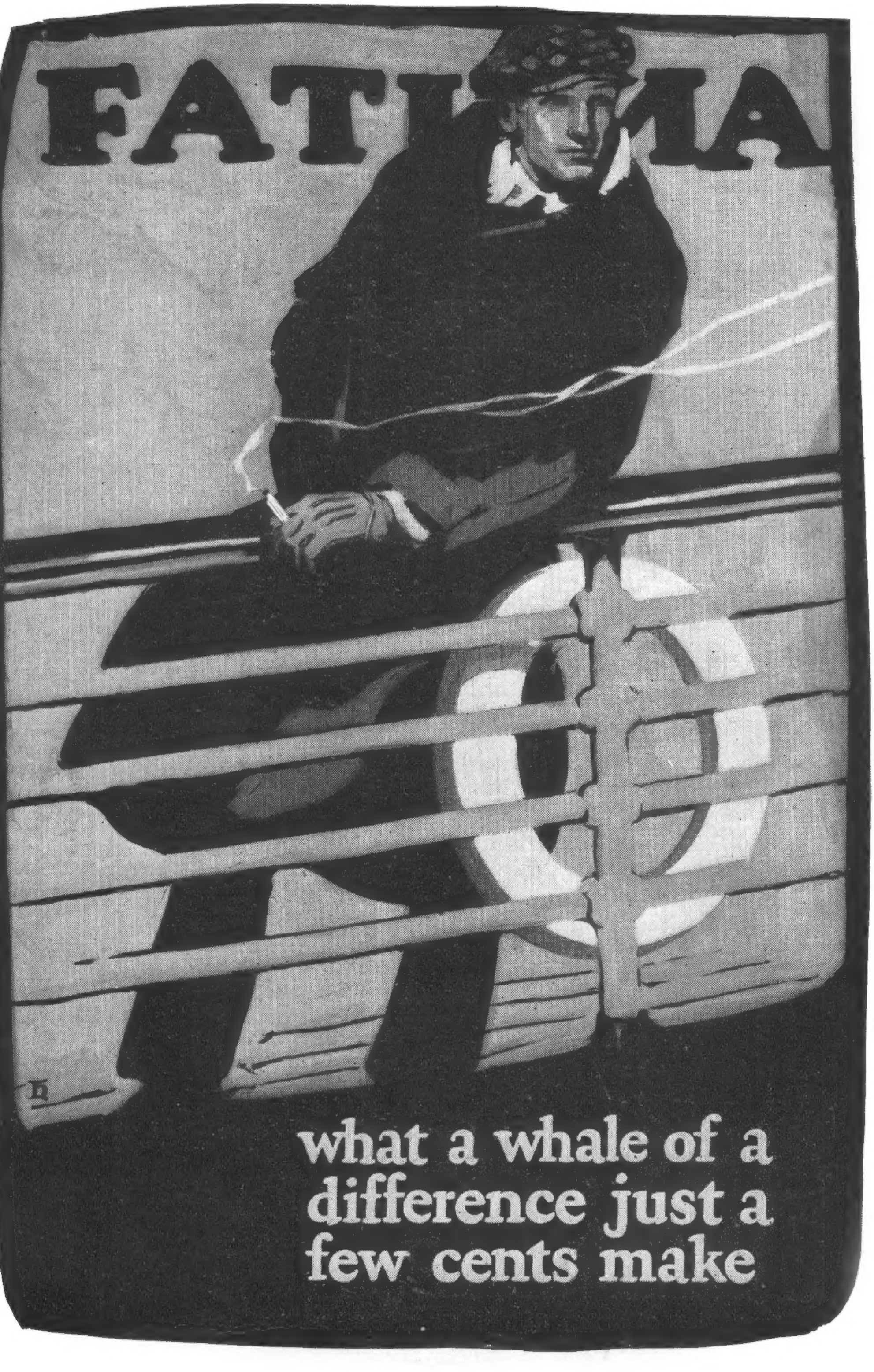
RODOMONT A Three-Part Story Part II — *H. Bedford-Jones*
Mont St. Michel held dire secrets.

THE SPOOK — *Arthur O. Friel*
Men of the mountains have no love for ghosts.

THE JINX OF THE WARLOCK — *Fairfax Downey*
Blockade running is a risky business.

STILL FARTHER AHEAD

THE THREE ISSUES following the next will contain *long* stories by T. S. Stribling, George E. Holt, Sidney Herschel Small, W. C. Tuttle, Robert Simpson, John Murray Reynolds, Hugh Pendexter, Thomson Burtis, Charles Victor Fischer and William Byron Mowery; short stories by L. Paul, Captain Dingle, E. S. Pladwell, Bill Adams, Charles Tenney Jackson, Alan LeMay, Wilkeson O'Connell, Barry Scobee, James Parker Long, Leonard H. Nason and others; stories of voodoo worshipers in Haiti, desert riders in Morocco, beachcombers in Japan, sagebrush sheriffs in the Southwest, cockney stewards off the Cape, white traders on the Fever Coast, rebels and revolutionists in Central America, cowboy detectives on the Western range, renegades on the Iroquois warpaths, aviators in the oilfields, pelt pirates in the Bering Sea.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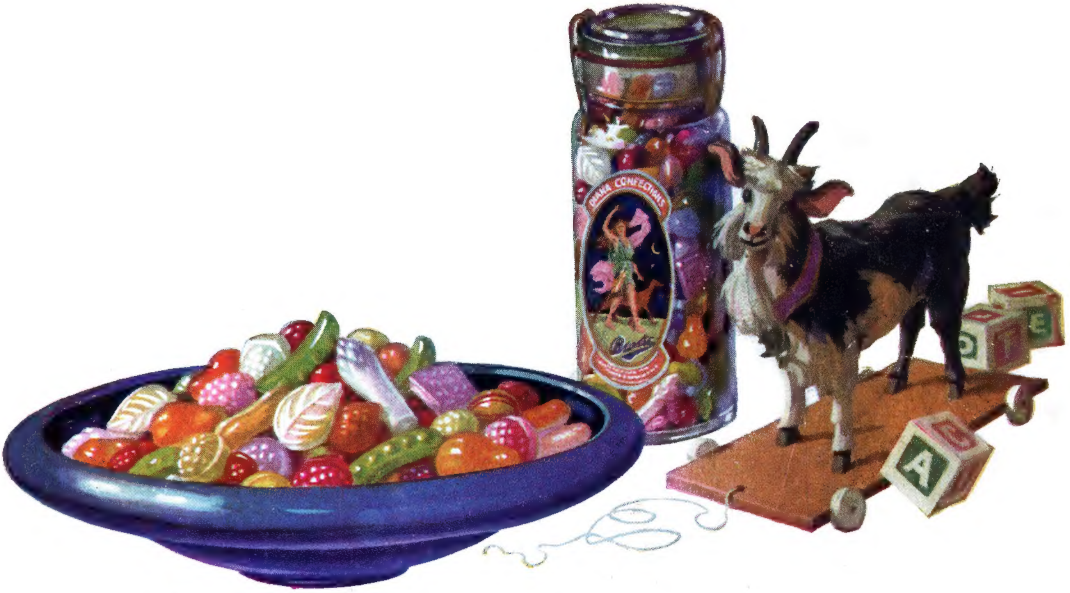

Thin..crispy..sugar shells *"stuft"* with pure..luscious fruit-jams.. ..nuts *and* Marmalades!......

THE first taste convinces—Diana "Stuft" Confections are purity itself! The children can eat their fill without fear. Long ago, we originated Diana "Stuft" Confections to meet all summer conditions. These crispy sugar shells are thin as paper, "stuft" with imported nuts and fruit-jams and marmalades, made in our own plant.

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